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# ART AND EXPERIENCE

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**Ananta Ch. Sukla**

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# *Art and Experience*

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AND  
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EDITED BY

*Ananta Ch. Sukla*

**STUDIES IN ART, CULTURE, AND COMMUNITIES**

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*In the sacred memory of my late grandparents*

LOKANATHA SUKLA

GAURI DIBYA

PANCHANAN BAHALI

KANCHAN DIBYA

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## PREFACE



The present volume inaugurates a new series from Praeger Publishers, a unit of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc. The series is intended to focus on the multifarious aspects of cultural phenomena crossing boundaries of nations, race, gender, language, and politics—crossing the boundaries of disciplines and departments of humanities, natural sciences, social sciences, and technology. Apart from the mainstream issues in human culture such as experience, emotion, expression, nationalism, social engagements, and taboos, what is more important for the twenty-first century is the erasure of the border between the arts and sciences that was drawn during the last several centuries in classifying the areas of human learning and culture. An interesting perspective in studying the arts, as explored by Ali Alpan, the renowned Turkish physicist, is the application of electromagnetic technology for recording and appreciating cosmic music. This is an exploration, which challenges both composition and performance of music that man has done so far. Simultaneously, new ideas and theories of architectural design might be formulated by studying the laws of gravitation. Philosophers have come forward to reflect upon the aesthetic values of the five natural elements, and the relevance of aesthetic values in human culture has been examined from multidisciplinary and cross-cultural viewpoints, cross-culturalism itself being no more a dominant–dominated relationship on a comparative method for evaluation and judgment. For the present century, cross-culturalism stands for a cultural reciprocation, engagement or negotiation, erasing all sorts of binary evaluative relationships such as major/minor, superior/inferior, original/imitation, and early/late.

The present century should also find its own modes of analysis and examination of the issues in lieu of the last century's dominating analytic style and method. Thinkers must be let free for devising their own modes of thinking as appropriate for their investigation. Keeping all these ideas and objectives in view, the Praeger series, *Studies in Art, Culture, and Communities*, announces

the release of its forthcoming volumes with the expectation that each of them shall meet the intellectual needs for decades to come.

In editing this series, I gratefully acknowledge the views and cooperation of the distinguished members of its advisory board: Chris Weedon (University of Wales), Gauri Viswanathan (Columbia University), Richard Woodfield (University of Nottingham), Stephen Davies (Auckland University), Bill Aschroft (New South Wales University), Michael Mitias (Kuwait University), John Joughin (University of Central Lancashire), and Graham Holderness (University of Hertfordshire).

Finally, I express my deep gratitude for the editorial board of Greenwood Publishing Group, Pamela St. Clare, ex-editor, and Eric Levy, the present editor of GPG Media, Culture, and Film Studies for their judicious consideration and cordial cooperation in launching this adventurous series.

ANANTA CH. SUKLA  
*Series Editor*

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In preparing this volume, apart from my gratitude to the contributors, I owe special thanks to Professor Stephen Davies of Auckland University for his assistance in a variety of ways. Professor Robert Stecker's chapter on literary experience is a revised form of his essay in his volume titled *Artworks: Definition, Meaning, Value*, published in 1997 by The Pennsylvania State University Press. I thank Sandy Thatcher for permission to print the essay in this volume. As usual, my wife Ranu and both my sons Chunnilal and Chamanlal have encouraged me during my studies; my pupil Sanjay Sarangi has prepared the bibliography and index; and D. Lokanath Dora has typed the manuscript: I am grateful to all of them.

Finally, the authorities of Greenwood Publishing Group, including their editorial board, deserve my boundless gratitude for publishing this bulk of specified scholarship.



## INTRODUCTION



### I



Experience is an epistemological concept. It refers to one of the ways we acquire knowledge. The Greek root of “experience” is *empeiria*, used repeatedly by Aristotle in many of his discourses. *Empeiria* is associated with two other terms, *mnēmē* (memory) and *aisthesis* (sensation and perception). Aristotle observes that man by nature desires to know. Knowledge has its genesis in both *aisthesis* and *mnēmē*, both of which constitute *empeiria*. Learning and recognition (*anagnorisis*) bring great pleasure to man. Thus experience—knowledge through perception and sensation—is not opposed to cognition or abstraction. It is a disposition (*hexeis*) anchored in man’s soul through repeated acquaintance with the same things. *Empeiria* needs *mnēmē* because we can have a meaningful experience by retaining many sensations of the same thing in our memory. For Aristotle, experience is the permanence of a cognition acquired cumulatively and retained in memory. While *aisthesis* gives us the differences in the things, the multiplicity of the various sensations of the same thing become the meaningful retention of a cognition of such differences. Thus, according to Aristotle, cognition is not an intellectual product opposed to sensation. Nor are immediate experience (what is immediately given to the consciousness) and concepts far apart. Thus *aisthesis* in Greek means both sensation and perception.<sup>1</sup>

The Latin origin of experience is *experientia*, which means “to put to test or trial” as also “proof by actual trial or practical demonstration.” Subsequently it also means “the actual observation of facts or events considered as a source of knowledge.” In current English it means the “process of gaining knowledge by doing and seeing things.” But the connotation of the term in the philosophical vocabulary far exceeds its dictionary origin. The modern notion of experience has suffered a derogation in implying no more than a chaotic multiplicity ordered by the superimposition of concepts of understanding.

Experience has been used more as a means of religious knowledge than as a means of scientific or logical investigation leading to any verified or verifiable knowledge based on objective events and facts of the actual world. Experience often implies a nonfactual subjective or mystic awareness of inner feelings and emotions that is ineffable.

Descartes's *cogito* implies the possibility of an experience of the subject without any external object. Again, the knowledge gained by experience is not necessarily factually valid. One may experience a ghost or an illusion. Besides, experience may not always be perceptual due to a direct contact of the subject with the object. Other means of knowledge such as inference, testimony, and analogy also contribute to one's experience. Thus "knowledge" and "experience" are not identical in this context. When knowledge is restricted to proof (objective criterion), experience might be proof-free.

In searching for something that is absolutely certain, without even the slightest doubt, Descartes dismisses the propositions evidenced by senses—hallucination, dreams, illusions, and madness. He writes:

But I have convinced myself that there is absolutely nothing in the world, no sky, no earth, no animals, no bodies. Does it now follow that I too do not exist? No: if I convinced myself of something then I certainly existed. But there is a deceiver of supreme power and cunning who is deliberately and constantly deceiving me, and let him deceive me as much as he can, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think that I am something. So after considering everything very thoroughly I must finally conclude that this proposition *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true wherever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind.<sup>2</sup>

Descartes further writes:

But what then am I? A thing that thinks. What is that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory experiences . . . for example, I am now seeing light, hearing a noise, feeling heat. But I am asleep, so all this is false. Yet I certainly seem to see, to hear, and to be warmed. This cannot be false; what is called "having a sensory perception" is strictly just this, and in this restricted sense of the term it is simply thinking.<sup>3</sup>

Descartes's assertion of the subjective consciousness independent of the external world, thinking or experiencing things or images without their objective or structural counterparts, along with Locke's notion of simple ideas or sensory qualities formulate the empirical foundation of both the nature of self and the nature of human knowledge in general. Later, Kant argued that while answering the question "How is experience possible?" we must analyze feelings along with reason. He considers various aspects of experience—theoretical, practical, aesthetic, and teleological—and finds a common structure for all the varieties of experience in his three philosophical *Critiques*, explaining the conditions for the application of classes of predicates. *The Critique of Pure*

*Reason* provides an analysis of experience in which an *a priori* part is distinguished from a *given* part; namely, how to apply the predicates “. . . is the cause of,” “. . . is earlier than,” “. . . is later than,” “. . . is external,” “. . . is omnipotent.” *The Critique of Practical Reason* provides an analysis of ethical experiences; namely, “. . . is right, is wrong, is a duty,” and so on. *The Critique of Judgment* provides an analysis of the experiences of beauty, sublimity, and purpose, and so on: that is, how to use the predicates such as “. . . is beautiful,” “. . . is sublime,” and “. . . is purposeful.”<sup>4</sup> While categorizing experiences into three modes, Kant would disagree with later critics like John Dewey that there can be any account of experience in general.

In the post-Kantian era experience was relegated to a phenomenon of “sensory apprehension” without any process of conceptualization. This was the phase when experience was understood in the Greek sense of *aisthesis* only, and was distinguished from metaphysical knowledge. Hegel’s “end of art” thesis proposed three modes of cultural expression: art, religion, and philosophy. Ancient Greek culture expressed itself in the mode of art. When the Greek culture of antiquity was taken over by Christianity, religion became the mode of cultural expression through the era in which Hegel himself believed to live: “For us, art belongs to the past. . . . Art will some day reach its perfection.”<sup>5</sup>

“With the advance of culture,” Hegel writes, “there generally comes a time for every people when art points beyond itself.”<sup>6</sup> Hegel’s “end of art” thesis does not mean that art will cease to exist in the course of the progressive development of human history. The truth is that every civilization follows the “art–religion–philosophy” mode of cultural expression. One might understand, following Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms, that art is the initial symbolic expression of a culture’s intrinsic values, where *aisthesis* or experience prevails over reason. The second phase of religion mediates between art and philosophy, between *aisthesis* and abstraction. Finally, the phase of philosophy is predominated by man’s abstract symbolization in cognitive sciences. Hegel claims that the successive epochs in a cultural history always stand at higher levels of man’s consciousness than the previous one. In this history of cultural progress there are two distinct dimensions: one is linear or progressive, and the second is cyclical or archetypal. In its linear dimension, man’s consciousness passes through the art–religion–philosophy pattern of cultural modes, reaching its final goal in a perfect rational state. In its cyclical dimension, the pattern rotates as the cultures rise and fall archetypally. These two dimensions of cultural history explain the Hegelian nature of history itself.<sup>7</sup>

Almost along the Hegelian line, Heidegger interprets experience as a sensory apprehension and equates it with the Greek *aisthesis*. He writes:

Aesthetes take the work of art as an object, the object of *aisthesis*, of sensuous apprehension in the wide sense; today we call this apprehension as experience. The way in which man experiences art is supposed to give information about its nature. Experience is the source that is standard and not only for art appreciation and enjoyment, but also for artistic creation. Everything

is an experience. Yet perhaps experience is the element in which art dies. The dying occurs so slowly that it takes a few centuries.<sup>8</sup>

For both Hegel and Heidegger, as it appears, the end or death of art signifies both the linear and cyclic evolution of human consciousness from *aisthesis* or experience to the abstract conceptualization of cognitive science. Significantly, Heidegger quotes Hegel: "One may well hope that art will continue to advance and perfect itself, but its form has ceased to be the highest need of the spirit. . . . In all these relationships art is and remains for us, on the side of its highest vocation, something past."<sup>9</sup>

While appreciating Hegel's Berlin Lectures (given during the winter of 1828–29) on aesthetics, Heidegger comments that Hegel's "end of art" thesis does not preclude the possibility of a rise of new art styles and movements. But the question is whether "art is still an essential and necessary way in which that truth happens which is decisive for our historical existence."<sup>10</sup> Heidegger is obviously questioning the essentiality of the experimental mode of knowledge and its perennality as a mode of cultural expression. "If, however, it is such no longer," Heidegger further comments, "then there remains the question why this is so. The truth of Hegel's judgment has not yet been decided."<sup>11</sup>

Experience regains its strength in Nietzsche, who asserts that "art and not morality, is . . . the truly metaphysical activity of man."<sup>12</sup> His critique of Christianity and Christian teaching as being hostile to human life and his interpretation of morality as a negation of life, a "secret instinct" of annihilation, a principle of decay, diminution, and slander—the "beginning of the end," "the danger of dangers"<sup>13</sup>—contradict the Hegelian pattern of "art–religion–philosophy" as the evolutionary process of human consciousness. Nietzsche's zest for life as it is lived with all its liveliness—with its wrongs and amorality—is remarkably a frank acknowledgment of the value of experience in human consciousness.

Since Husserl, out of the two German words used for the English "experience"—*Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*—the latter is more expressive in connoting the subjective emotional implications of the word "experience" as a state of mind, being affected by an event or other things. Broadly speaking, *Erfahrung* designates scientific experience. Gadamer distinguishes between the two senses of this term: the *scientific survey*, the way in which experience or experiments confirm each other, and second, the *dialectical or historical sense* that emphasizes negativity. The first sense indicates that in natural sciences, one experiment is repeated in another in the sense that a series of scientific experience is possible only when the preceding and succeeding experiments confirm each other. On the other hand, the dialectical or historical *Erfahrung* indicates a learning process where the succeeding experience negates the previous one. Learning is an organic process of growth in which we experience the error or insufficiency of our previous views that we need to transform in order that we may experience afresh. Following Hegel, Gadamer calls this process of experience a "reversal in consciousness."<sup>14</sup> Similarly, drawing upon Dilthey's

insight, Gadamer distinguishes between two senses of *Erlebnis*: The first sense refers to what is directly or immediately given to the individual consciousness—the cognitive function as such without any imposition of mathematical categories or physical laws in order to construct anything objective by the subject. On the other hand, the second sense of *Erlebnis* refers to the subjective response to the world in which it is experienced in emotional terms of pleasure, pain, and indifference. The concept of *Erlebnis* signifies the wholeness and intensity of human experience against scientific abstraction, and as a critique of rationalism it upholds the values of emotions and feelings in man's subjective experience.<sup>15</sup>

Recent philosophers of religion discern two kinds of experience: perceptual and introspective, and propose a twofold structure of perceptual experience: intentional and veridical. Keith Yandell writes:

Experiences that seem to one to be of something that, if it exists, is an object with respect to oneself are intentional in their structure and they are so in regard to the object (if any) in question. My seeing the bear in the zoo is intentional relative to that real animal; my seeming to see a bear in your dining room is intentional in structure, and is intentional regarding your real bear, if any.<sup>16</sup>

Describing a veridical perceptual experience, Yandell writes:

If John (phenomenologically) seems to be aware of a lion, and there indeed is a lion that John is aware of, then . . . John's experience is *veridical*. Given the notion of veridicality, we can rephrase the notion of a *perceptual* experience in this manner: John has a perceptual experience if and only if it (phenomenologically) seems to John that John is aware of an item that is an object relative to John if the experience is veridical.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, introspective experience concerns aspects rather than objects: "John has an introspective experience if John (phenomenologically) seems to be aware of something that (if it exists) is an aspect relative to John." In other words, "John has an introspective experience if John (phenomenologically) seems to be aware of something that is an aspect with respect to John if the experience is veridical."<sup>18</sup> An intentional perceptual experience need not be veridical.

## II



Close to the German *Erfahrung/Erlebnis* distinction is the distinction between discursive and nondiscursive experience, and the two senses of *Erlebnis* are parallel to the indeterminate (*nirvikalpa*) and determinate (*savikalpaka*) perceptual experience of Indian epistemology. As William Halbfass presents the facts, this correlation of the German concept of experience with the Indian

one is not merely parallel, there are possibilities of the influence of the latter on the former. Dilthey's appreciation of the "comparative" or "morphological" method and Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" do express a need for appropriation of the Indian thought by Western thinkers. Although Husserl, Heidegger, and Gadamer fostered a negative attitude for any such Indianism, Halbfass says that

Gadamer's apparently negative and destructive critique has, nevertheless, a positive potential. It can encourage us to see the fact that, in approaching Indian thought, we carry with us our Western perspectives and presuppositions not merely as an impediment and aggravation, but as a necessary and positive ingredient of understanding itself.<sup>19</sup>

This possibility of influence apart, what is significantly noted is the domination of *Erlebnis* over *Erfahrung* during the period under reference, clearly a symptom of the domination of religion over science and metaphysics and the domination of subjective experience over ontological objectivism. This is exactly the situation that dominated the whole of Indian culture during its heydays from the Vedic period until the end of the classical age (10th century B.C. to 11th century A.D.) and in the revival by Neo-Hinduism during the colonial era (19th century A.D.).

There are several critical Sanskrit terms used by the Indian metaphysicians and philosophers of religion, language, and art that are very close to Yandell's classification of experiences according to their structures and contents, although it is difficult to cast them exactly on the models of Yandell's classification. The common word used for all the schools of Indian metaphysics is "*darśana*," which literally means "visual perception." Knowledge or cognition of the R(r)eality is a visual perception as accepted by all the schools of Indian philosophers—orthodox, heterodox, realists, and idealists. This perceptual experience might be intentional or veridical depending upon the nature of R(r)eality as viewed by the philosophers. For the idealists (Buddhists and Vedantins), Reality is an indeterminate perceptual experience—it might be intentional from the realistic point of view, but veridical from the idealistic point of view. But for them, the existence of Reality is invariably experiential, not material—it is not necessary that an experience should have any content external to the experience concerned. In other words, the experience of reality is self-contained.

Philosophers of religion have used some other words, along with *darśana*, such as "*anubhava*" and "*anubhūti*" for the spiritual realization or experience of a divine entity. Although both these words mean "after (*anu*) existence (*bhāva/bhūti*)," derived from the root *bhū* meaning "to be," it is difficult to say that a spiritual experience presupposes the existence of the divine being prior to the devotee's experience. Such existences mostly are nothing other than the subjective experiences. The Vedic maxims such as "I am He," "thou art He" imply such experiential existences where the linguistic discursiveness is absolutely lost. Grammatical differences of number, gender, and person are

meaningless. Along with three ways of knowledge (i.e., perception, inference, and verbal testimony), grammarians consider a fourth way, which they call “*pratibhā*” (a flash of intuition). This peculiar cognitive process is a nondiscursive experience by which one understands a verbal text both scriptural and nonscriptural. This is a nonsensory apprehension, a self-illumination by which a man of highest intelligence experiences the absolute Reality in its form of pure consciousness, as also in its manifestation in nature and in forms of verbal expression that include poetry. In fact, this *pratibhā* is the source of experiencing beauty of both nature and the arts as it is defined by an authority named Bhaṭṭa Tauta: “That intelligence which unfolds the forms of things afresh and anew.”<sup>20</sup> Thus *pratibhā* is both a creative and critical experience.

A common Sanskrit term explaining both religious experience and experience of art and beauty is “*tanmayatā*,” meaning literally a conscious state completely absorbed into an external object or internal mental state or consciousness. A devotee’s consciousness is absorbed into his deity in whatever form he wishes to experience him. This is a state whereby the object and subject of consciousness are one and undivided. Similarly, in experiencing an artwork, the consciousness of the audience and the aesthetic object are one and undivided.

Other terms that the aestheticians use for the experience of artworks are gustatory metaphors such as *rasa*, *rasanā*, *carvaṇā*, and *āsvādana*, all meaning literally “savor” or “relish”—relishing an emotion or *bhāva* in its general form. *Bhāva* in Sanskrit means “existence.” When the dramaturgists and literary critics use this term in the sense of “states of mind” (*cittavṛtti*), they draw upon Patañjali’s (2nd century B.C.) philosophy of mind<sup>21</sup> and imply that the highest form of Reality or Existence is an emotion in its purest form. Thus consciousness in its purest form is the same as the purest form of an emotion that is the absolute Reality or Existence. Spiritual experience and experience of art and beauty are only different forms of emotional states of consciousness. “They are the sons of the same mother (*sahodara*),” as a Sanskrit critic puts it.<sup>22</sup> If the deity is an emotional entity for the devotee, an aesthetic object is also an emotional experience of the aesthete. In both cases the experience is the same: tasting (*āsvādana*) of one’s own consciousness, with the difference that in the former, the limited “I” is completely absorbed into the deity (or for a *yogin*, into the Absolute Consciousness), every other phenomenon vanishing from the consciousness, whereas in the latter, there is a presence of the latent states of emotions that are aroused by the aesthetic object.<sup>23</sup> In the spiritual experience the emotional state attains its archetypal form, whereas in the experience of art and beauty the emotional state retains its specific forms such as love, laughter, fear, sorrow, disgust, courage, anger, and wonder.<sup>24</sup>

## III



The present volume offers a group of essays that examine different aspects of experience such as the religious, scientific, linguistic, and aesthetic and also identify the specific modes of experiencing nature and different forms of art. Relevant aesthetic concepts and theories are examined cross-culturally while viewing the critical issues with interdisciplinary perspectives.

In the first chapter, Keith Yandell classifies the entire range of experiences on the grounds of structure and contents. Structurally, there are two kinds of experience: intentional and nonintentional. Similarly, on the basis of contents, there may be several sorts of experience such as sensory, introspective, moral, aesthetic, mathematical, religious, and logical. As regards the class of scientific experience, Yandell observes that although there is no exact and lucid designation for such phenomenon, most plausibly scientific experiences refer to sensory experience within certain constraints: An experience is scientific only if it is sensory and public or intersubjective. On the other hand, religious experience is an intentional sensory experience.

In chapter 2, John Llewelyn interprets the experience of language as language's *Erfahrung*: the experience, learning, wisdom, and subtlety acquired by language become what is experienced in the sense of what is *erlebt* by speaker or writer. It becomes an object of *Erlebnis*. Experience is also an experiment in the sense of its Latin origin, "*experientia*." It is to experience as experiment that the work of art moves when it is no longer a passive undertaking, but an active going over, putting over. The genius, wisdom, and subtlety of language allow the experience of language to be at one and the same time *épreuve*, as passive suffering, and *épreuve*, as active test. Authorities such as Peirce, Saussure, Wittgenstein, Foucault, Derrida, Eco, and Kermode are solicited for expounding the central arguments of the issues concerned.

T. J. Diffey observes in chapter 3 that the Kantian paradigm of aesthetic judgment does not offer an adequate model for explaining the experience of a work of art, although it might be adequate for explaining the experience of nature. The experience of art differs from the experience of nature insofar as the former implies evaluation of art whereas the latter does not. Diffey distinguishes the beauty of art from the beauty of nature with reference to Aristotle's realistic views versus the idealistic views of the Hegelian tradition, and he reviews Aristotle's view that the ugly in nature is transformed to the beauty in art by virtue of the artwork's representational quality in terms of Hegelian observations. He questions the identity of nature's ugliness with its representation in an artwork. Following Wittgenstein, Diffey remarks that nature invites the projection of experience, whereas the artwork is the intentional object of experience. He also highlights the reversal of the Aristotelian "nature-first" position in the contemporary "art-first" position, and, following Hegel on art but Kant on nature, comments that "art offers aesthetic experience not available in nature."



Having articulated the central feature of the Deweyan aesthetic experience in chapter 4, Joseph Kupfer considers how art provides the opportunity for refined and concentrated forms of this experience. He then offers his own account of the ontological status of art.

In chapter 5, Richard Woodfield considers pictorial experience as the experience of pictures not in their widest sense, but in a specific sense—a sense that lies behind a tradition of imagery extending from Egyptian art up to the present. He models his exposition on the suggestion of Ernst Gombrich that we concentrate on the mechanisms at work behind the function of such images. Thus his study does not “revolve around a discussion of the ‘aesthetic’ so much as that which *makes* the aesthetic.”

Robert Stecker observes in chapter 6 that there is no single, unique concept of experience of literature. There might be several choices, and Stecker’s choice is “that a plausible conception of the cognitive value of literature is symbiotically related to this conception of aesthetic experience.”

The composer, the performer, and the listener of music have their own experiences of music. But, in chapter 7, Stephen Davies focuses on the experience of the listener whose understanding and appreciation of music are both perceptual and cognitive. In this context, he discusses several significant issues, such as whether the listener experiences truths that are ineffable, whether we can experience music as the composer’s contemporaries did, how far musical experience is hedonic or autotelic, and what role repetition plays in experiences of music.

In chapter 8, Graham McFee applies the contemporary cognitivism to understanding dance experience. Following the thesis of Arthur Danto, McFee observes that to experience dance means to experience bodies in movement as *transfigured*. He concludes that the experience of dance is as much visual and aural as are the experiences respectively of painting and of music.

Ananta Sukla, in chapter 9, discusses different traditional theories of aesthetic experience and aesthetic attitude. Drawing upon classical Sanskrit criticism, he observes that a major critical crisis lies with the modifier “aesthetic.” Aesthetic attitude, aesthetic quality, and aesthetic experience move in a circle. He asserts that Sanskrit criticism was free from such circularity insofar as the critics did not specify any experience that could be identified by any general modifier such as “aesthetic.” Experiences of different arts differ in accordance with the ontological status of the arts experienced. The Indian (Sanskrit) notion of aesthetic attitude differs from its Western counterpart. The aesthetic attitude of the audience does not refer to any disinterestedness or any psychic distance because the audience actively *participates* in the aesthetic object. The experience of art and the experience of nature are experiences of different kinds, because in the former case the audience is necessarily aware of the representational character of the aesthetic object. The beauty of nature and the beauty of art are neither defined nor experienced in terms of any single modifier.

Finally, in chapter 10, John Carvalho’s key point in differentiating the experience of photography from the experience of film is that the latter is pub-

lic in ways that the former is not. He draws upon Dewey's notion of experience that he considers attractive "because it accommodates a wide range of experiences as well as the convergence of these experiences in the course of a personal life or a shared history." In scrutinizing the different species of visual and audiovisual experiences of photography and film—the two different media of communication—Carvalho consults several authorities in the areas of these media such as Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Georges Dumézil, Susan Sontag, and Laura Mulvey.

## NOTES



1. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, A1, 980b 25–29; *Poetics* 14, 1448b, 5–20; *De Anima* II 12, 424a, 16, 24; *De Anima* III 2, 427a, 6–7, 10ff; *Analytica Posteriora* I 31, 87b, 28–30; *Analytica Posteriora* II 19, 100a, 17; 100b, 4–5. For English translations, see *Great Books of the Western World*, ed. R. N. Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1952).
2. "Second Meditation," *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), vol. 2, pp. 16–17.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
4. Richard Kuhns, *Structures of Experience: Essays on the Affinity between Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), p. 54.
5. Robert Wicks, "Hegel's Aesthetics: An Overview," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 369.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 370.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 79.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. "Attempt at a Self-Criticism," in Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), p. 22.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
14. Georgia Warnke quotes from Gadamer's "Truth and Method" in *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition, and Reason* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), p. 26. Warnke offers an analysis of the points concerned in pages 26–32.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
16. Keith E. Yandell, *The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 36.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
19. William Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Philosophical Understanding* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1990), p. 164. See chapter 21 for a discussion of the concept of experience in comparative perspective.
20. For the epistemology of *pratibhā*, see Bhartṛhari's *Vākyapadīya*, II 117, 143, 148 (English translation with notes by K. A. S. Iyer [New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass,

1977]); for this concept's application in literary theory, see Abhinavagupta's commentary on Ānandavardhana's *Dhvanyāloka*, chapter 1. Bhaṭṭa Tauta is quoted in Abhinavagupta's commentary on Bharata's *Nāyaśāstra*, 6.31 (edited by V. Siddhanta Siromani [New Delhi: Delhi University, 1960]).

21. See Patañjali, *Yogasūtram*, chapter 1, for the terms *rasanā* and others. See Abhinavagupta's commentary on Bharata's *Nāyaśāstra*, 6.31.

22. Viśvanātha Kavirāja, *Sāhityadarpaṇaḥ* (Varanasi: Chowkhamba, 1976), 3.2.

23. Raniero Gnoli, *Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta* (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, 1968), p. 83.

24. Bharata's *Nāyaśāstra*, chapter 6.31 as elaborated by Abhinavagupta and explained by Gnoli (ibid.). For Abhinavagupta's notion of different levels of experience such as *jāgrat* (waking), *svapna* (dream), *suṣupti* (sound sleep), *curyā* (the fourth state/pure/impersonal), and *curyātītā* (beyond the fourth one/the absolutely impersonal), see G. T. Deshpande, *Abhinavagupta* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1989), pp. 81–99. Abhinavagupta adds the fifth one to the traditional notion of four levels of experience spoken of in the Upanisads (although there is one Upanisad called *Turiyātītā*; see S. N. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy* [the Indian edition] [New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975], vol. 1, p. 28). I do not agree with Deshpande that Abhinava considers aesthetic experience as purely transcendental. The purely transcendental state of experience explains the spiritual experience of a *yogin* where the individual is completely absorbed into the universal. But in the *rasa* (aesthetic) experience the individual consciousness is not absolutely lost. See my chapter 9 in the present volume.

CHAPTER ONE

# *Scientific Experience and Religious Experience*



KEITH YANDELL

Some titles don't need explanation: "The Eating Habits of Elephants" is self-explanatory; "Scientific Experience and Religious Experience" is not self-explanatory. None of the key terms in the title is lucid. Thus we had best begin by explaining their senses as they will be used here.

## "EXPERIENCE"



An experience is a conscious state. Seeing the wall, reflecting that utilitarianism is a false ethical theory, noting that necessary truths possess their necessity necessarily: tasting a mint, hearing a bell ringing, wondering whether God exists, and so on, through an endless list, are experiences. While philosophers in various traditions have spent enormous energy denying this, so far as I can see experiences require subjects of experience—no experiences without experiencers. The experiencers cannot just be more experiences; nothing can be experiences all the way down. The same is true here for constructs and conventions. Not everything can be constructs or conventions for reasons analogous to why not everything can be experiences.

Experiences can have actual objects—real things that they are experiences of: seeing a tiger is an experience with an actual object. But some experiences do not have objects, nor do they seem to; feeling nauseous, having generalized anxiety or generalized euphoria, being dizzy, and the like neither have, nor appear to have, objects. Further, some experiences seem to have objects that in

fact they lack: seeing a mirage or an orange afterimage has, so to speak, the “feel” of experiencing something real but there is no corresponding oasis or orange dot out there in public space. I remember, when I was very young, staring at dust motes as they danced in sunlight pouring in through a window and wondering whether the dust motes were real, and whether the orange spots I saw when I looked away were real. I asked my mother, and this was, I think, my first very modest philosophical conversation. I learned that the motes were there to be seen and the afterimages were not. This was not phenomenologically evident. Hallucinations, illusions, and dreams seem to be of real objects, but are not. This “seeming to be of a real object, whether there is such an object or not” is apparently a feature shared by various experiences, some of which are of actual objects and some of which are not. It is best viewed, I think, as a structural feature of such experiences, both of those that have actual objects and those that lack them. Of course, those experiences that neither have, nor seem to have, actual objects lack this structural feature. One of the standard meanings of “intentional” when applied to experiences is that they possess this structural feature of at least seeming to be of an actual object. Using this terminology, we can speak of two sorts of experiences, using structure as the basis for classification: intentional and nonintentional.

There are various sorts of experience if we use content as the basis for classification: sensory, introspective, moral, aesthetic, mathematical and logical, religious, and so on. Perceptual experiences, and some religious experiences, are intentional in structure. What makes some experiences sensory and others religious is content, not structure.

## “SCIENCE”



There obviously isn't any one thing called “science.” Various natural sciences exist, and each is distinct if it is not reducible to any other science. The relevant criteria for reducibility have to do with laws and entities. If science *B* has two basic laws, *L3* and *L4*, and science *A* has two basic laws, *L1* and *L2*, then if *L3* turns out to be an application or derivative of *L1*, and *L4* turns out to be an application or derivative of *L2*, the laws of science *B* reduce to those of science *A*. Roughly, if the laws of theory *A*, typically given certain “bridge laws” that correlate the terms in which the laws are stated, entail the laws of theory *B*, and not conversely, the laws of *B* reduce to the laws of *A*. Current prospects for the law reduction of all other sciences to some one science seem bleak. The situation regarding reduction among sciences, so far as laws are concerned, leaves us with various distinct sciences.

If science *B* deals with baps and science *A* deals with zubs, and it turns out that baps just are organizations of zubs, the entities of science *B* reduce to those of science *A*. Entity reduction is possible even in the absence of law reduction. It might well be the case both that baps are just collections of zubs,

and that collections of zubs fall under laws different from those that apply to zubs one at a time. Or new laws might come into play when collections of zubs reached a certain size or achieved a particular sort of organization that did not apply to lesser numbers or to differently organized collections. Insofar as sciences deal only with material items, prospects for entity reduction are brighter than prospects for law reduction.

The question of what exactly it is to be “material” is more complex than one might expect. It is difficult to state a single criterion for being material or being physical that is shared by all of the natural sciences.<sup>1</sup>

Much of the supposed opposition between science and religion, and scientific experience and religious experience, arises from the purported link between science and materialism. While a great many philosophers and scientists are materialists, there is not anything like universal agreement on which variety of materialism is correct. Disputes surrounding mind–body materialism include proponents of type-identity theory (every thing of a mental type is identical to some thing of a corresponding physical type), token-identity theory (every mental entity is identical to some physical item, but various types of physical entities may be identical to things of one mental type, or various types of mental things may be identical to things that are of one physical type), and functionalism (*being a mental state* is to be understood in terms of playing the right sort of causal role rather than in terms of some intrinsic feature, such as consciousness). There are strong objections to each view. It may well be that for every variety *M* of materialism, there are more materialists who reject *M* than materialists who accept it. Further, there are many scientists and philosophers who are not materialists. It is at least arguably the case that whatever materialist consensus exists among scientists and philosophers, it does not indicate the presence of some massive weight of evidence or some powerful un rebutted arguments in favor of materialism but rather reflects a consensus of convenience and peer pressure, plus the mistaken view that it is to materialism that science owes its successes.

The intelligibility and plausibility of the above comments concerning reductionism rests on there being some discernible sense of the term “science.” The fact is that there is a discernible denotation for the term—a collection of disciplines that count in the academy as sciences, natural and social. It is vastly less clear that behind the denotation there is any connotation that expresses what it is that the denotata share. Thus Peter Caws writes that

[t]he term “scientific method,” if applied to scientific investigation in general or to some thing allegedly embodied in the practice of every branch of science, can only refer to the lowest common denominator of a range of methods devised to cope with problems as diverse as classifying stars and curing diseases. If such a least-common denominator exists—that is, if some recognizable characteristics are shared by the extremes of the methods plausibly called “scientific”—it can amount to little more than fidelity to empirical evidence and simplicity of logical formulation, fidelity to the evidence taking precedence in cases of conflict.<sup>2</sup>

The net effect of this for our purposes is that it isn't exactly lucid what the term "science"—or hence the term "scientific experience"—should designate. It can't properly refer only to controlled experiments, in the sense of experiments that we can set up laboratory conditions for. That would be unconscionably hard on geology, paleontology, and astronomy, for example. The most plausible approach would presumably be to use the term "scientific experience" to refer to sensory experience within certain constraints—roughly, to visual, tactual, auditory, olfactory, and gustatory experiences of a sort that can be had under predictable conditions by any appropriately gifted or "normal" observer. If one wants to insist on more than five senses—senses of balance, heat, cold, pleasure, pain, and the like—one can simply add the preferred candidates to the list of the standard five senses. On this suggestion, an experience is scientific only if it is sensory and public, where:

- a. experience *E* is sensory if and only if *E* is a visual, tactual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, or . . . experience, and
- b. experience *E* is public if and only if any normal perceiver in the circumstances in which *E* is had by its subject would have a sensory experience that is near enough to be qualitatively identical to *E*.

Still, one must be careful here. Suppose that only a subset of persons—say, those over six feet tall, red-headed, left-handed, and with double-jointed thumbs—ever had a certain sort of sensory experience. They recognize the presence of certain small and highly dangerous insects that inhabit only very cold regions and are detectible only by sight or after they have entered the bloodstream with fatal effects caused in no other manner. Such persons might be highly sought after by those engaged in polar exploration, even though the experiences that they alone had were not public. Their reports would find their way into entomology in spite of that fact. Their experience would not be public by criterion (b), but it would presumably be true that they could agree or disagree with one another and outsiders could compare their experiential reports. Thus their experiences would be available as evidence for the existence of exotic insects without being public.

In order to allow for this possibility,<sup>3</sup> we can define an experience as *intersubjective* as follows: An experience *E* is intersubjective if and only if it is had by various people who can disagree with one another and whose experiential reports can be compared but that *E* is not public. We can then revise our notion of a scientific experience by saying that such an experience must be sensory in content and be either public or intersubjective. Even if we were unable to construct technology successful in detecting the insects by any other means than the observations of the select few, it would be only reasonable to think that there existed what they at least seemed to see. Nor would wise polar investigators wait to hire them until they knew whether such technology could be and would be developed. An evidential problem will arise only if the technology that should detect the insects was developed and it detected noth-

ing. Then we would need more detailed information about the case in order to know just what to conclude.

Perhaps another constraint should be added regarding what sort of proposition scientific experience can provide evidence for. Perhaps we need some such constraint as this:

- c. scientific experience *E* is evidence for some proposition *P* if and only if there is some circumstance in which failing to have *E* would be evidence against *P*.

This additional constraint is controversial and dubious. It is a version of the assumption that if one can have experiential evidence for a claim, then in principle one can have evidence against it. Further, it assumes that the proper version of this assumption comes in terms of a requirement that the same, or same sort, of experience that is proposed as evidence for a claim be such that, in circumstances of the sort in which it provides confirming evidence, its failure to occur would provide disconfirming evidence. Perhaps this is correct for such cases as seeing an eagle: If one's seeing an eagle in clear daylight in open country is evidence that an eagle is there, then not seeing one in the same sort of conditions is evidence that no eagle is there. But there are subtler cases that are at least conceivable in contexts that anyone would grant are scientific, and in these subtler cases the requirement seems plainly unjustified.<sup>4</sup>

A different and more modest version of the assumption is expressed if one requires only that if there can be some experiential evidence in favor of a claim, then it must be possible in principle that there be some experiential evidence against it, and that the experience that provides that evidence must be of the same sort to which the evidence that provides the positive evidence belongs or would belong. Presumably the converse also holds—possible evidence against entails possible evidence for, each from experiences that, were they to occur, would be of the same sort. This requirement is neither contentless nor lucid, there being some force to the notion of “same sort of experience” as there is some content to the notion “beyond a reasonable doubt,” but not the sort of precision available in, say, the lower ranges of symbolic logic. For present purposes, then, let a scientific claim be any logically contingent claim for which sensory experience that is public or intersubjective can in principle provide confirming or disconfirming evidence.

## EVIDENCE AND INTENTIONAL EXPERIENCE



In the second of his *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, George Berkeley presents his idealism in the form of a dialogue between Hylas and Philonous—the former of whom is a realist about physical objects and the latter represents Berkeley himself. Philonous proposes that pain experience is a



paradigm for, or a fair representative example of, sensory experience. This is a key move. That one feels pain is no evidence whatever that there exists a mind-independent pain to be felt. Pain experience is not intentional in structure—it is an experience that has a certain negatively toned content, not an experience that seems to be a matter of being aware of something such that, if it exists, it does so independently of the subject who has the experience. Once Hylas grants Philonous his example as a paradigm for sensory experience across the board, Philonous no longer has to worry about sensory experience being evidence for the existence of items that exist independent of being sensed.

Berkeley, then, perceptively sees that if sensory experience is intentional, it raises a problem for his own view. He is an idealist, holding that there are no mind-independent, distinct-from-experience material objects. In his view, what we mistake for such are really neither more nor other than nonintentional sensory experiences—conscious states with sensory contents but not possessing intentional structure. Rather than sensory perception being a matter of our being in conscious states with intentional structure in which we typically are aware of things that have observable properties and that exist independent of our experience of them, what actually occurs is that we are in conscious states that are not intentional in structure—that are, for Berkeley, like aches and twinges. These states have sensory content but do not involve its seeming to us that there are extended extra-experiential items. To suppose otherwise, Berkeley contends, is to be misled by false philosophy.

Berkeley makes his suggestion for a simple reason. Suppose Chandra, as we ordinarily say, sees a monkey. If this is a matter of there sensorily seeming to Chandra to be a spatially located mammal that, if it is actually there, exists independent of Chandra's seeing it, then it is hard as well as pointless to resist the view that Chandra's experience is evidence that the monkey is there. If we have experiential evidence in favor of there being material objects, it is because something like this principle is true:

- P.* If Chandra has an experience in which Chandra sensorily seems to see an item *X*, then Chandra has evidence that *X* exists.

This, in turn, is a concrete, particular statement behind which lies some more general and abstract assertion as

- P\*.* If person *S* has a sensory experience with an intentional structure such that it sensorily appears to *S* that *S* experiences an *X*, that is (at least *prima facie*) evidence that there is an *X* that *S* experiences.

Berkeley has no desire to have to argue against (*P\**) or its kin. As noted, he suggests a view instead on which sensory experience is not intentional in the first place, so that the best one could say for (*P\**) is that it simply does not apply to sensory experiences. He takes it, in effect, that using (*P\**) assumes that such experiences have an intentional structure which they in fact lack.

The problem with Berkeley's tactic is that while it is a shrewd polemic, sensory experience is phenomenologically intentional. It seems at least to be a matter of encountering an external world. Thus principles like (P) and (P\*)—no doubt in more sophisticated forms—do apply to sensory experience. Ironically, Berkeley's strategy is like that of the critics of religious experience who want to take all experience of God as mere godly experience. Their idea is that all apparent experience of God is to be regarded as experience with a certain content or feeling tone. They think it is properly modeled on pain, though instead of having a hedonically negative-feeling tone, it has an awe-struck feeling tone or the like. But, in fact, at least the apparent experience of God is intentional in structure, and pain is no more a proper model for it than it is for sensory experience.

We can summarize as follows: The point of Berkeley's strategy regarding sensory experience, and the secularist's strategy regarding theistic religious experience, is to claim that, whether or not such principles as (P), (P\*), and their successors are true or not, sensory and theistic religious experience lack intentional structure. Hence such principles do not apply to them. These strategies, based though they are on a false assumption, do underline an important fact—namely, that someone's having an experience, sensory or religious, that is intentional regarding some *X* is in some manner favorable to the idea that there is an *X* to be experienced.

### *Probability and Likelihood*

A very common suggestion is that sensory evidence is best understood in terms of probability or likelihood, the latter being an informal cousin of the former. For example, such assumptions as that every proposition has some specific probability or other, given another proposition, and the idea that every proposition has some probability on necessary truths alone, are not held to apply to likelihood.

Suppose Chandra has an experience in which he at least seems to see a tiger. Then the idea is that the reason that Chandra's experience is evidence for there being an actual tiger is that it is more probable on the hypothesis that there is a tiger to be seen, than it is on the hypothesis that no tiger is there, that Chandra at least seems to see a tiger. There seems little hope of quantifying the proposed probability. Asking how great the proposed probability is, beyond some suggestion to the effect that it is greater than 0.5 percent, inquires with a hope unlikely to be satisfied.

The issues this proposal raises are complex and difficult. Suppose one reasons as follows: On the hypothesis that an omniscient being wants that fact *F* obtains—and wants it in such a manner that nothing will prevent that being from bringing about that fact—the probability of *F* obtaining is 1. So whatever facts obtain provide evidence that there is an omniscient being who wants that fact to obtain in such a manner that nothing will prevent her from bringing it about. For any fact that does obtain, the probability that it obtains, given the assumption of an omniscient desirer of its obtaining, is

1; hence every fact that obtains is evidence that such a deity exists. Here is an argument to make the atheist unhappy. Of course, many theists will be almost equally unhappy, since the argument favors divine determinism, and many theists hold that God permits things that God does not overridingly, or at all, want to obtain.

One can complain that this explanation will be equally appropriate no matter what facts obtain. The argument is just an appeal to what might be called the *theistic formula*: *An omniscient being can make obtain anything he or she really wants to obtain*. While that is true, the proponent of the argument can rejoice in this extremely powerful generator of explanations, noting that it is not only compatible with facts of the sort, *the obtaining of fact F1 explains the obtaining of fact F2*, but also explains them via that *an omniscient being overridingly wants that the obtaining of fact F1 explains the obtaining of fact F2*. All of our science can fit into the worldview generated by the theistic formula plus something actually (and contingently) being the case.

Is it the case that, since if God overridingly wants some fact to obtain, it will obtain, so that all facts have a probability of 1 given enthusiastic enough application of the theistic formula, then each fact is such that its obtaining is evidence that God exists? If not, why not? Perhaps these questions reveal something of the complexity of the idea that if proposition *Q* is more probable on proposition *P* than it is on *not-P*, and *Q* is true, then *Q*'s truth is evidence for *P*'s truth.

Other matters also arise here. Whether measurable in more precise terms than "more than one half, less than one half, exactly one half," it is clear that Chandra's at least seeming to see a tiger is not always, in every context, going to make it more probable than not that there is a tiger. It is never going to give a probability of 1 to there being a tiger. As Descartes points out via his evil-deceiver fiction, no proposition of the form *Chandra at least seems to perceive an X entails there is an X*; it is always logically possible that a proposition of the former form be true and the corresponding proposition of the latter form be false.<sup>5</sup> A related point is that we can add hypotheses such as *Chandra drank some "makes-you-seem-to-see-a-tiger" tonic ten minutes ago, and it takes the stuff ten minutes to work* or *Chandra's mischievous friends have created a tiger hologram where Chandra will see it* and then it won't be more probable that Chandra is seeing a real tiger than that he isn't, even if, given just that Chandra at least seems to see a tiger, it is more probable than not that there is a tiger. The most interesting probability or likelihood relative to some proposition is the one it possesses on all the relevant information, though of course having all the relevant information, let alone knowing that what one has is all the relevant information, can be highly problematic.

What matters most here is a simple question: why think it is more probable that, if Chandra at least seems to see a tiger, that is more probable on the hypothesis that there is a real tiger than on the hypothesis that there is not? To be precise, the question is this. Consider:

C. *Chandra at least seems to see a tiger.*

T. *There is a tiger that Chandra sees.*

not-T. *There is no tiger that Chandra sees.*

Why suppose that

L. *The likelihood or probability of T is raised by C.*

L1. *The probability of C on T is greater than the likelihood of C on not-T.*

are true? And why think that it is at least in the neighborhood of (L) and (L1) that we find the explanation or grounding of Chandra's experience of the at least apparently seeing a tiger being evidence that there is a tiger that Chandra sees?

## TWO THESES



I offer two controversial theses here. The first is: *That experience E raises the probability of proposition P* does not entail that *E is evidence for P*. The other is that to the degree that (L) and (L1) are true—and I do not propose to contest them—that fact is explained by another fact, namely, that intentional experience is (of course, defeasible) evidence for the claim that there is what there experientially seems to be.

In what follows, let such variables as “P, Q, R” range over logically contingent propositions—propositions that are possibly true and possibly false, neither themselves contradictory nor possessed of contradictory denials.

### *Two Propositions*

Consider two propositions:

- A. For any evidence E, and propositions P and Q, if E is evidence for P and P entails Q, then E is evidence for Q.
- B. For any evidence E, and propositions P and Q, if the probability of P on E is N, and P entails Q, then the probability of Q on E cannot be less than N.

### *Probabilifying*

Let us say that if proposition P has some probability on proposition Q, then Q *probabilifies* P. For one proposition to probabilify another is not for it to make it more probable than not, but only for there to be a probability value of one proposition on the other. Proposition B follows from the so-called axioms of probability theory, and I will not challenge it here.

## THE ARGUMENT TO COME



In what follows, I will argue that (i) proposition *A* is false; (ii) since *B* is true of probabilifying, and *A* is false of evidence, the relation *being evidence for* is not the same relation as *probabilifying*; (iii) *the probability of P on E is N* does not entail, no matter what value *N* has, *E is evidence for P*; (iv) for any proposition *P*, there is another possibly true proposition *Q* such that, on *Q*, the probability of *P*'s truth is greater than 0.5 percent; and (v) for any proposition *P*, there is another possibly true proposition *Q* such that, on *Q*, the probability of *P*'s truth is less than 0.5 percent.

*That Proposition "A" Is False*

Suppose Jack has an experience, the phenomenological content of which justifies him in saying *If this experience is reliable, then I am experiencing something that fits description D*, where *D* simply says what features it at least experientially seems to Jack that something has. Then Jack's experience is evidence that *Something fitting D exists*. If there ever is experiential evidence for anything that exists independent of our experience, (*P*) or (*P*\*) above or some more complex cousin is true. What an intentional experience can be evidence for is a function of what its phenomenology is; its phenomenology constrains what an experience can be evidence for.

There are two positive ideas here. One of them is expressible via our previous (*P*\*):

- P*\*. If person *S* has a sensory experience with an intentional structure such that it sensorily appears to *S* that *S* experiences an *X*, that is (at least *prima facie*) evidence that there is an *X* that *S* experiences.

The other positive point can be put a little more formally by speaking of *relevance conditions*. Seeing my computer screen does not provide me with evidence that the next president of the United States will be a martian; not every experience is evidence for every claim. How does one tell what the evidential potential of an experience is? The answer is fairly simple: Mary's experience *E* provides evidence that some object exists or has some quality only if Mary's having *E* is a matter of its experientially seeming to Mary that the object in question exists or has the quality in question. Such experiences meet the appropriate relevance conditions for such claims. Only claims that meet the relevance conditions regarding the phenomenological content of an experience are (directly) evidentially supported by that experience itself, though there is also the possibility that some further proposition that the experience is (direct) evidence for in virtue of its meeting the relevance conditions regarding the experience in turn provide (indirect) evidence for the proposition not directly evidenced by the experience.

Suppose Jack walks into his study and at least seems to see a zebra—he is, as some philosophers like to say, *zebrally-appeared-to*. This is evidence that there is a zebra in Jack's study, and if he takes his at least apparently seeing a zebra to be evidence for there being a zebra that he sees, Jack proceeds with epistemic propriety.<sup>6</sup> I suggest, then, that in the situation described, Jack has evidence that there is a zebra that Jack sees in his study. Plainly, *J1: There is a zebra that Jack sees* entails *J2: Jack is not subject to the machinations of a zebra deceiver*. A zebra deceiver is a being capable of making Jack seem to see a zebra even though there is none. But Jack's at least seeming to see a zebra—his being *zebrally-appeared-to*—is not evidence for *Jack is not subject to the machinations of a zebra deceiver*. Why not? Because *J2* does not meet the relevance conditions relative to Jack's experience of at least seeming to see a zebra; nothing in the phenomenology of being *zebrally-appeared-to* gives support to there not being a zebra deceiver.<sup>7</sup>

The fact is, then, that *A* is false. Jack's sensory experience is evidence for *J1*, *J1* entails *J2*, and Jack's sensory experience is not evidence for *J2*.<sup>8</sup>

### Two Direct Consequences of the Falseness of Proposition "A"

We are taking it that, for any case of probabilifying, *B* is true. One consequence of *B*'s truth and *A*'s falseness is this: the *being evidence for* relation does not satisfy the schema,

S: If *E* has *R* to *P*, and *P* entails *Q*, then *E* has *R* to *Q*.

But the *probabilifying* relation does satisfy this schema. Hence the *being evidence for* relation is not identical to the *probabilifying* relation. Another consequence is that *E probabilifies P* does not entail *E is evidence for Q*. (Whether *E is evidence for Q* entails *E probabilifies Q* is an open question so far as the argument here is concerned.)

*That every proposition is positively probabilified (given a probability of > 0.5 percent) relative to some other possibly true proposition and negatively probabilified (given a probability of < 0.5 percent) relative to some other possibly true proposition.*

The argument here is simple. For any proposition *P*, there is some proposition *Q* such that the probability of *P* on *Q* is less than 0.5 percent. Consider two persons, Kim and Kit. Kim is a devout monotheist and Kit a robust atheist. Both are such that 60 percent of their beliefs are true. Consider, then, the propositions *KM: Kim is a theist and 60 percent of Kim's beliefs are true*, and *KT: Kit is an atheist and 60 percent of Kit's beliefs are true*. Given *KM* alone, the probability of theism is 0.6 percent. Given *KT* alone, the probability of atheism is 0.6 percent. Why? Think of Kim as a belief-bag from which one can draw beliefs—for example, by presenting Kim with a proposition and asking Kim "Do you believe this?" and getting an accurate answer (suppose that Kim is

very good at identifying what Kim believes, would never lie about such a thing, does not get confused about affirmative and negative answers, and the like). Then the betting odds on a proposition Kim believes being true are 6 to 4. Similarly, for a proposition that Kit believes, provided that we (in each case) cast those odds in terms simply of what one of them believes. Theism and atheism are exclusive and exhaustive beliefs, related as *P* and *not-P*. For any propositions *P* and *not-P* we can work a Kim–Kit scenario. Hence for any proposition *P*, there is some proposition *Q* such that the probability of *P* on *Q* is less than 0.5 percent.<sup>9</sup> This does not, of course, tell us what the overall probability of *P* is—what probability (if any) *P* has, given the set of all propositions relevant to *P*'s probability status.

Suppose that Kim and Kit, as described, are actual persons. The existence of Kim's cognitive structure—her having beliefs 60 percent of which are true and among which acceptance of theism is to be found—is not evidence that theism is true, and the existence of Kit's cognitive structure is not evidence that theism is false. Probability can be the basis of reasonable betting without being a basis for claiming evidence; were this not so, it would not be a basis for reasonable betting. Saying that the probability of theism, given KM and KT, is 0.5 percent, even if this is true, does not tell us anything about the evidential status of theism. It is not merely the case that it does not tell us anything about the evidential status of theism *overall*; it does not tell us anything about any of the evidential status of theism.

We asked earlier, why think that Chandra's at least seeming to see a tiger is more probable given that there is one to be seen than it is given that there is not one to be seen? There are possible worlds in which seeming to see a tiger is superb evidence that there is *not* one to be seen—worlds in which all perceptual experiences of mammals are deceptive, in which seeming to see an animal of one kind is always correlated with there actually being an animal of a different kind, and so on. But there is something epistemically defective about those worlds. The ground of that defectiveness is simply that at least seeming to see a tiger is evidence that there is a tiger. The evidence is defeasible, overturnable, trumpable, merely *prima facie*, and the like; but it is evidence.

If this long discussion is correct, the *probabilifying* relation is different from the *being evidence for* relation, and the former relation seems to be grounded in the latter rather than the reverse. My suggestion is that the *being evidence for* relation is primitive, not definable in probabilistic terms.<sup>10</sup> It is time to turn to looking more fully at that relation.

## EXPERIENTIAL EVIDENCE



However exactly it is conceived, sensory observations play a role in science. However exactly it is conceived, religious experiences play a role in religion. Further, it is generally held that sensory experiences play some sort of

evidential role in scientific matters. Often, religious experience is said to play some sort of evidential role in religious matters. The notion of evidence is not the most lucid in human thought, and I have no general theory of evidence to offer. Nonetheless, some remarks about experiential evidence, and about sensory and religious experience as evidence, are relevant here.

If there is any evidence that there are noses or trees or grass, the evidence is sensory—a matter of there at least sensorily seeming to us to be such things, of our at least apparently perceiving noses, trees, or grass. It is logically possible that we seem to perceive such things and they aren't there at all. It is logically possible that we seem to perceive such things and they are not much like what they appear to be—that there aren't, mind-independently, any colors, sounds, tastes, smells, or feels but there are only elementary particles in motion that, in collections, seem to have these features. The world as physics describes it lacks the features that novels, artists, movies, and travel brochures represent it as having. But even if the truth is that the world lacks those features, and has only the features that appear in descriptions in physics or physics plus some other natural sciences, the fact is that the evidence for claims in physics and the other natural sciences is partly and crucially perceptual. It may well be that God is more like God seems to be in intentionally structured theistic religious experience than the denizens of the material environment are like what they appear to be in ordinary sensory experience. This, along with the deep difficulties in the notion of materiality and the identity conditions of physical objects, should engender a good deal more modesty in materialism and a good deal less weakness of the claims made in what generally passes as contemporary theology.

### *Nonperceptual Evidence*

The evidence for propositions in logic is not perceptual. That any argument of the form *If P then Q, and P; therefore Q* is valid is a necessary truth, and its truth is accessible to a cognitive experience in which one sees that things cannot be otherwise. That cognitive experience is not perceptual experience—not a matter of at least seeming to perceive some observable object to have some observable property. The same holds in general for recognizing necessary truths in mathematics, metaphysics, and ethics. But regarding noses, trees, or grass, the experiences relevant to providing a reason for thinking that there are these things are perceptual, or at least they include perceptual experiences.

### *Some General Features of Evidence*

That *e* is evidence for *P* is an objective relation between *e* and *P*—if *e* is evidence for *P*, it is such independent of anyone knowing this and that *e* is evidence for *P* is something discovered, not something invented. *Being evidence for* is an objective relation between what is evidence and what it is evidence for. The target of evidence—what it is evidence for—is the truth of some proposition. Statements of the form *e is evidence for P* are shorthand for *e is evidence for the truth of P*, where *P* is something that is either true or false, and thus is a proposition.



There can be evidence for a false proposition. Discovering that *P* is false is not the same as, nor does it entail, discovering that there can be no evidence on *P*'s behalf. We can put this in a sort of slogan: *Evidence is truth-supporting but not truth-entailing*. In longhand it is that *e is evidence for P* entails *e supports P's truth* but does not entail *P is true*. Given the objectivity of the *is evidence for* relation, there can be evidence that no one has. Someone *has evidence e* only if they are aware of *e*, though not necessarily as evidence. If there being rocks of the sort I am looking at are evidence that this area was once under a glacier, then I have evidence that this area was once under a glacier, though I need not know that I have evidence for this or that the rocks are evidence for something. I can take something to be evidence even if it is not, and I can take it not to be even if it is. That is, a proposition of the form *S takes e to be evidence* does not entail *e is evidence*, and a proposition of the form *S takes e not to be evidence* does not entail *e is not evidence*.

Nonetheless, at least most of what we encounter is, objectively, evidence for something, even for a variety of things. Thus we have evidence for a great deal more than we take ourselves to have evidence for. That we at least seem to see chairs in the room is evidence that there are chairs, that there are artifacts, that there are physical objects, that someone invented chairs, that chairs are manufactured, that people can invent things, that people do invent things, that someone intended that people sit in this locale, that there are raw materials, and so on. If it is true that there are dependent things only if there is a necessarily independent thing capable of causing them, then its at least seeming that we perceive chairs is evidence that God exists.

Evidence can be propositional—the proposition *George Washington was a U.S. general* is evidence for the proposition *The U.S. had armed forces during at least part of George Washington's lifetime*. Evidence can be experiential—at least seeming to see a rosebush is evidence that there is a rosebush. Evidence is always propositionally expressible but not always propositionally expressed. That a proposition *P* entails a proposition *Q* does not entail that *P* is evidence for *Q*. *P: Either Jon is a college president or 17 is even, and 17 is not even* entails *Q: Jon is a college president*, but *P* is not evidence for *Q*.

### *Constraints on a Theory of Perceptual Evidence*

It is by no means easy to offer a satisfactory theory of evidence in general or of perceptual experience as evidence in particular. Any such theory must operate within certain constraints if it is to be a genuine candidate for being the correct theory. Here are some of the constraints; each should be thought of as starting out *If person S's having experience E is to be evidence for perceptual proposition P then . . .* and a perceptual proposition is to be thought of as any proposition that says that an observable object exists or has some observable property:

1. It is logically possible that *S* has *E* and *P* be false.
2. It is logically possible that all of everyone's perceptual experience occur as it does and there be no physical objects at all.

3. S's having *E* is a matter of its sensorily seeming to *S* that some object exists or has some observable property, and there are such experiences.
4. An experience can only be direct evidence for a claim that meets the relevance conditions to it, though it can be indirect evidence for a proposition *Q* in virtue of being direct evidence for a proposition *P* that in turn is evidence for *Q*.
5. Barring the sort of case described in constraint 4, S's having an experience that is a matter of *S* at least sensorily seeming to experience some item *x* that has some feature *F* can only be evidence that *x* exists and has *F*.
6. If *e* is evidence for *P*, what *e* is evidence for is *that P is true*.

### Comments on the Constraints

Constraints 1 and 2 are necessary truths. To have a perceptual experience is to be in a conscious state that has sensory content. Perceptual experiences are matters of its sensorily seeming or appearing to someone that some observable object has some observable property—that a nose is pug, a tree has branches, some grass is brown, or the like. Sensations—twinges, pains, and the like—are not perceptual experiences. Perceptual experiences, whether illusions or hallucinations or sensory encounters with actual objects, are conscious states in which it seems to someone that there is some observable thing, whether there is that thing or not. They have what we might call a *there is this observable object phenomenology*.

What constraint 1 notes is that a person *S*'s having an experience with a *there is this observable object* phenomenology does not entail that there is this observable object. What constraint 2 notes is that all the persons there are having all the experiences with *there is this observable object* phenomenologies they have does not entail even *there is some observable object or other*. If a proposition *P* does not entail a proposition *Q*, then necessarily *P* does not entail *Q*. Since constraints 1 and 2 are true, they are necessarily true. (Of course, having a perceptual experience may have a pluralistic *there are these observable objects* phenomenology, but this does not change anything of substance.)

What constraint 3 does is say what a perceptual experience is. Of course, one could use the term "perceptual experience" in lots of ways—to refer to buckets of molasses, or to the number 19, and so on. But there are experiences of a certain sort—conscious states the having of which or the being in which is a matter of there sensorily seeming to one to be a bunch of grapes on the table, a dog in the chair, or a friend across the room. It is a common thing to have such experiences, and "perceptual experience" is often used to refer to experiences of this sort. So constraint 3 uses the term in this sense and notes that there are experiences of this sort.

What constraint 4 notes is this: sometimes one perceives one thing and

infers another thing. One sees a fresh footprint and infers that a bear was recently here, smells onions and peanut butter and infers that earlier Uncle Charlie unfortunately made his favorite sandwich again, notes that one's chair is warm and infers that the family dog has been comfortable during one's absence. Such inferences are in order only if there is a truth of the right sort in the neighborhood—one that connects what is observed to what one infers to. This sort of case is properly described as perceptual experience providing *indirect* evidence for the existence of some observable item that has some observable feature.

What constraint 5 says is that, except for cases of indirect evidence, perceptual experiences provide evidence that is direct if they provide evidence at all. They provide direct evidence only regarding what it is, if anything, that the person in question at least seems to be perceiving. An experience whose phenomenology is a matter of *there seeming to be a hog* is not direct evidence for there being a golden sword, a dozen roses, or a Rolls-Royce. If it is evidence for anything, it is evidence that there is a hog—and of course for whatever that proposition (nonvacuously) entails, like there being a mammal, an animal, a material thing, and the like.

What constraint 6 notes is the necessary connection between evidence and truth. The connection obviously is not that everything we have evidence for is true; rather, it is that *being evidence for* is short for *being evidence for the truth of*. Evidence is truth-favoring but not truth-entailing. What it favors is the truth of some proposition. Perhaps this should be obvious—the more obvious it is, the better.

### *A Theory of Perceptual Evidence*

Here is a modest theory of perceptual evidence:

*TPE:* If person *S* has an experience *E* whose phenomenology is a matter of *there being observable object O that has feature F*, then *E*'s occurrence is a bit of evidence that there is an observable object that has *F*.

There sensorily seeming to you that there is an orange in the box is a bit of evidence that there is an orange and a box; there sensorily seeming to you that a wombat sits on the mantle is a bit of evidence that there is a wombat and a mantle. A perceptual experience is evidence that something exists by way of its being a matter of its appearing to someone that something has some feature.

How does all this relate to intentional theistic religious experience? That intentional sensory experience is evidence that there are perceivable objects is a consequence of a more basic truth to the effect that intentional experience of any sort is evidence for the existence of the things it seems to be experience of. The general truth entails that, should that occur, intentional religious experiences—centrally, experiences in which people seem to experience God—are evidence that God exists. The occurrence of such experience does not entail that God exists—unless some successful version of the cosmological or onto-

logical argument exists, such experiences could occur even if atheism were true. Nonetheless, intentional theistic religious experience is evidence for the existence of God. The basic consideration is that if experiences occur that are intentional regarding God, then they are evidence that there is a God to be experienced. There is a whole of objections to this suggestion, among them the following: that intentional theistic religious experience is disanalogous to sensory experience in ways that rule it out as a source of evidence; that social-science explanations remove any evidential force that intentional theistic religious experience might have; that God or intentional theistic religious experience is ineffable; that religious traditions enter too fully into the composition of religious experiences for the experiences to be evidence for the traditions; that religious experiences cannot be intentional relative to God; and that if religious experiences were evidence, they would cancel out each other.<sup>11</sup>

Central among the objections to the idea that intentional theistic religious experience is evidence that God exists is that intentional theistic religious experience is not public in the sense defined by the second objection above. This is true, and it is important to the degree that it entails that there is no manner in which more than one person can have an experience that is at least plausibly to be of the same being and that experiential reports cannot be compared. Suppose that Tom in Chicago and Shilpa in Benares each have an experience in which it at least seems to them that they are aware of an awesome, majestic, powerful, living, holy being—an experience whose phenomenology is, say, similar to that reported in the Book of Isaiah, chapter 6. If there is a being of the sort that there seems to Tom to be, is it plausible to suppose that it is the same as the being that there seems to Shilpa to be, if such a being exists? Suppose that similar experiences have occurred in many times and places. Philosophers who would ordinarily leap to talking of parsimony often here forsake its appeal. Nonetheless, if the descriptions of the at least apparent object of the experience in one case is similar to that in other cases, particularly in widely different cultures and times, that is a consideration in favor of there being one object of the various experiences. Thus such religious experiences are, to use our earlier language, intersubjective. If there is a highly developed conceptual system that, if true, explains things both explicable in principle and hard to explain, which has the existence of such a being as its central tenet, that is another favorable consideration. Also relevant is whether there is any evidence against that system. To discuss these matters would be to enter into the question of what sort of evidence, if any, intentional theistic religious experience actually, and on the whole, provides.

For present purposes, the basic point is that an intentional experience that is a matter of its experientially seeming to someone that there is some X is evidence that there is that X. The rational presumption is that this is true of religious experience unless there is special reason to think otherwise. That there is such special reason requires careful defense, and the argument that intentional theistic religious experience is evidence for theistic belief has two components: the original explication of the idea that experience that is intentional

regarding some *X* is evidence that there is that *X*, and a reply to arguments that intentional theistic experience is an exception. Our concern here has been with the original explication.

## NOTES



1. Cf. Tim Crane and D. H. Mellor, "There Is No Question of Physicalism," in *Contemporary Materialism*, ed. Paul Moser and J. D. Trout (London: Routledge, 1996).

2. Peter Caws, "Scientific Method," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan Publishing/Free Press, 1972), p. 339.

3. Perhaps those allegedly able to discern whether an egg laid by a chicken is a prospective hen or rooster is an actual case of the present sort. Perhaps experiences accessible only to those trained in the use of highly expensive technologies are a close analogue.

4. For argument for this claim, compare the present author's *The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

5. The proposition "of the corresponding form" simply being one in which "*X*" is replaced in it by whatever replaced "*X*" in the proposition of the former form.

6. At least he does so on certain highly plausible assumptions. Consider the following principle (*P\**): If a person *S* has an experience *E* that, if reliable, is a matter of being aware of an experience, independently of existing item *X*, and *S* (nonculpably) has no reason to think that *E* is canceled or counterbalanced or compromised or contradicted or confuted or logically consumed or empirically consumed, then *S*'s having *E* provides *S* evidence that *X* exists.

Consider Jack's experience of at least seeming to see a zebra. The first two relevant terms in (*P*) are defined, relative to an experience providing evidence, as follows: 1) Jack's experience is *canceled* as evidence if he has reason to think that he would seem to experience a zebra whether or not there was one. 2) Jack's experience is *counter-balanced* as evidence if he has reason to believe that he would not be able to experientially discover that there is no zebra in his study, even if there is none there. 3) Jack's experience is *compromised* as evidence if Jack has reason to believe that it is not logically possible that *There is a zebra in the study* be experientially disconfirmed. 4) Jack's experience is *contradicted* as evidence if Jack has reason to believe that it is logically impossible that there is a zebra in his study or to believe that the existence of the initial physical conditions we have reason to think obtain plus the laws of nature are incompatible with there being a zebra in the study. 5) Jack's experience is *confuted* as evidence if Jack has reason to believe that there is a being that is a zebra but produces what appear to be experiences of a zebra. 6) Jack's experience is *logically or in fact consumed* as evidence if it is logically impossible, or inconsistent with the existence of the initial physical conditions we have reason to think obtain, plus the laws of nature, that there be experiences of the same kind as Jack's experience that provide evidence against *There is a zebra in the study*.

Since Jack, we shall suppose, has no reason to think that any of items 1 through 6 provides a basis for casting doubt on his apparent zebra-sighting, he is right in taking that experience to be evidence that his study is graced by a zebra's presence.

7. Strictly, our brief discussion of experiential evidence concerns what we might call the evidence of acquaintance—direct evidence, sensing *X* rather than sensing *Y* and inferring to *X*. Any experience can, in principle, be evidence for anything. If one has a good theory that includes or entails *If someone at least seems to see a zebra then there are unicorns on Mars*, one can come to have evidence that there are unicorns on Mars by coming to know the theory in question and learning that Jack has at least seemed to see a zebra. While there is little to be said for this particular theory, there is neither some way nor some need to rule in advance what theories can be discovered that, attached to particular bits of experiential evidence, will allow justified inference to what existential claims. But our concern here is with direct evidence.

8. My argument here is in part due to my memory of a lecture by Fred Dretske. If it is right, Fred deserves credit; if it is not, no doubt I misremember.

9. For very complex propositions, for example, the descriptions under which a human person believed them might be rather scant compared to their content, but there is no need to make Kim and Kit subject to whatever limitations humans have, and in any case scantness of description relative to propositional content is no basis for objection to the point being, Kim might believe, and Kit might disbelieve, that under some system of ordering the propositional content of an omniscient mind proposition 10,004 is true without their knowing what proposition that was.

10. The argument offered above, if successful, shows that evidence is not *fully* analyzable in terms of probability. My suggestion goes beyond the conclusion of that argument.

11. See the present author's *The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (op. cit.) for responses to each of these objections.

## CHAPTER TWO

# Close Reading, Distant Writing, and the Experience of Language



JOHN LLEWELYN

The belief that a text might be an open proclamation, available to all, coexists comfortably with the belief that it was a repository of secrets. And this quality of sacred books is inherited by their counterparts in the secular canon.<sup>1</sup> Taking close reading as its point of departure, this chapter then widens its focus in order to consider the experience of language with some reference to art, interpretation, and “archi-writing.” This last will also be called “telescripture,” written in the lower case, so that through the first and second syllables, derived not from *telos* (end) but from *têle* (distant, far) and through the allusion to upper-case Holy Scripture that its third and fourth syllables make, an opening is marked for the eventuality that archi-writing is theography.

## I



In its technical sense, the expression “close does the experience of language let close reading get” is chiefly used of literary texts and of the approach to them advocated by the New Critics. They maintained that a text, whether a poem, a play, or a novel, is to be read independently of its social, biographical, and historical context and that what matters primarily are “the words on the page,” that the author’s intentions and the affect or other effect the words have on the reader are irrelevant to the work as a work of art, and that what the work asks for is a close reading of the text in itself and of the more-or-less complex internal interrelationships of its parts. Like the well-wrought urn of

the title of one of the books by Cleanth Brooks, what is paramount is the ontology of the work. The business of the text is its "isness." Hence the slogan that "a poem should not mean, but be." The paradigm of the work of art is the poem regarded as "verbal icon." Frank Kermode will say later that "the image is" and that "poetry, by virtue of the image is."<sup>2</sup> Below, we shall return to images.

How close does the experience of language let close reading get? The phrase "experience of language" is to be understood not only in its objective genitivity as the experience someone may have of language, but also in its subjective genitivity, as language's experience. Although these two genitivities are interdependent, I want to attend first to the sense in which we may say of a language that it embodies a degree of experience, rather as we may say of people that they are experienced or wise. As people may become wise through experience, so in the course of its history—and the sense of travel, *fahren*, is close to the surface in one of the German words for experience, *Erfahrung*—a language acquires experience and a degree of what we may provisionally call "wisdom." Indeed, the experience of language contributes to the experience of people and of a people, though it is arguable that just as not all people grow wiser as they grow older, so too in the course of the history of a language, the language may become less sensitive, for, like people, languages are liable to *Verfallenheit*; they have a propensity to fall, though in their fallen state they may retain a potentiality for being salvaged, if not a potentiality for salvation understood as being made whole.

Taking the words "experience of language" in this sense, illustrations of which will be given in what follows, how close, for the second time of asking, does the experience of language let close reading get? The answer to this question, put in the way it would be put by Peirce, is that reading can never be so close that what is read is a generality or an individual unmediated by words or other signs. Put in the way it would be put by Derrida, the answer is that reading can never get so close to meaning as to be fully present to it and to itself. My meaning in what I read or write or say is never entirely mine, notwithstanding that, as Hegel is pleased to observe, the word *Meinung* invites us to equate meaning with making *mein*, making mine, "mining." This does not mean that we cannot mean what we say; it means that we are always, necessarily, not accidentally, liable to say more than we mean or otherwise other than we mean. In his interpretation of one version of the dream of semantic *parousia*, the version according to which we most faithfully read how reality is when we purport to indicate a sensory datum with the word "This," Hegel asks its proponent to write this word down. Immediately, with the moment of utterance having slipped from the present into the past, the word "This" has to be replaced by the word "That," and the "Now" of that moment has become a "Then." A further moment's reflection suffices to make us realize that the spoken word suffers the same fate. The closeness that speaking may seem to promise is prevented by a distancing, a temporal deferral to a time when the speaker is no longer present, when she or he is in the same position as a writer,



all writing being testamentary, in that it is addressed to, among others, readers who come after the writer's death—that is to say, after the death of the first reader, and after the death of other readers—after the death of the other. Likewise for any thinking that is supposed capable of being conducted without any direct or indirect dependence on written or spoken signs, such as was supposed to be possible at least in principle by Plato, Augustine, and Husserl. Plato already begins to disturb this dream of a pure thought-language when, having described thinking as the conversation the soul has with itself, he compares the *forms* or *ideas* that are the objects of that thinking to marks inscribed on the tablet of the mind.

Whether what signs signify are conceived as individual or as general, a *signum-signatum*, “Fido”-Fido foundation for linguistic meaning is supposed in the semiotics of the three thinkers just named and of many other theoreticians, notwithstanding their acknowledgment of the need to supplement this account of the alleged foundation with an account of how the *signata* are connected. In Saussure's *Course of General Linguistics* (1915) the order of priority is not simply reversed. Rather, connectedness, whether by sameness or difference, what Plato calls *symplokē*, intertwining, and what medieval logicians call “syncategorematic expressions” (e.g., “if,” “and,” and “or”), are held to be constitutive of even nominal, categorematic, deictic, and other purportedly free-standing expressions. This “structuralism,” as Saussure's readers came to call it, maintains that, with the exception of onomatopoeic words, the importance of which Saussure argues is marginal, the meaning of a sign is not anything positive or posited; rather is it a sign's differences from other signs, as illustrated by the fact that while the signs “red” and “blue” may fill the space in “The sky is \_\_\_\_\_,” the sign “because” normally will not. On Saussure's differentialist account of meaning, the meaning of a sign is the product of relations of differences among marks or sounds—what he calls the *signifier*—and differences among signifieds, where the signified is the concept, connotation, or meaning, the semantic object or objective, the “internal accusative” thanks to which the sign may refer to the object as understood in Peirce's definition of a sign as “Anything [called by Peirce the *representamen*] that determines something else (its *interpretant*) to refer to an object to which [it] itself refers (its *object*) in the same way, the interpretant becoming in turn a sign, and so on *ad infinitum*. . . .”<sup>3</sup>

This object may happen to be the “internal object” externalized by being regarded as a referent. That is to say, the referent may happen to be another semantic object. It is this again when someone says, “I do not approve of a statement like that.” Umberto Eco offers this as an example of that sort of sign that Peirce calls an index, and he offers it because, as he expresses it, he is “eager to challenge Peirce's idea that indices, in order to be understood as signs, must be connected to the object they designate.”<sup>4</sup> Peirce distinguishes indices from icons and symbols. A symbol could not function as a sign, could not have a particular signification, he says, unless it had an interpretant; that is, unless it can be interpreted, translated, or otherwise glossed. And whereas

an icon can still be significant even if its object does not exist (for example, a pencil stroke standing for a geometrical line), this is not how it is with an index. "An *index* is a sign that would, at once, lose the character that makes it a sign if its object were removed, but would not lose that character if there were no interpretant."<sup>5</sup> Eco counters this with the example cited earlier, "I do not approve of a statement like that," of which he says that even where nobody has recently made a statement, the indexical expression or shifter "that" retains its meaning. The hearers will be puzzled by what the speaker has said, and try to recollect to what statement he can be referring. In other words, they will take the speaker to have presupposed, "I am naming through the shifter something that is not there, and that preceded the present statement." From this, Eco concludes that the meaning of the indexical "this" "is understood even if the presupposed event or thing does not exist and never has existed."<sup>6</sup>

Allow me to say of Eco's statement, echoing him, "I do not approve of a statement like that." I doubt whether Eco's statement, in the circumstances in which he envisages it made, is a counter-instance to what Peirce actually says. That it is not is suggested also by Eco's taking the possibility of telling a lie as further proof that what Peirce says is wrong. Eco says that "a lie is made possible by the fact that sign-vehicles always convey a content, even when there is no testable referent." But what I take Peirce to mean is that if there were no object to be referred to, a putatively indexical sign, unlike an iconic sign, would lack the character that would make it an *indexical* sign. He is concerned not only with signification in general, but with marking the differences between the three kinds of signs: iconic, indexical, and what he calls "symbolic." Take as a clue what he says about an iconic sign: "An *Icon* is a sign that refers to the Object that it denotes merely by virtue of characters of its own, and that it possesses, just the same, whether any such Object actually exists or not. It is true that unless there really is such an Object, the Icon does not act as a sign; but this has nothing to do with its character as a sign."<sup>7</sup>

This seems to conflict with the case of the stroke penciled on a piece of paper as representing a geometrical line. Of this iconic sign, he says that it "would possess the character that renders it significant, even though its object had no existence."<sup>8</sup> If what he means by the geometrical line having no existence is that it does not exist in the way that marks on paper do, but is a theoretical entity of which we might say that it only subsists, then there is no conflict. In this case the iconic sign, the mark on the paper, does have an Object in the sense he says is required for the icon to act as a sign, taking him to mean by this acting specifically as an *iconic* sign. A sign would not act as an iconic sign if it purported to stand for a round square. But we should still understand that it purported to stand for something; we should still understand what is required for a sign to function iconically. Unless we did, we would not be able to say that it fails to function iconically because round squares do not exist in any possible world or, in his phrase, in any "mode of existence."<sup>9</sup> This understanding is the understanding of the concept of the iconic, and a concept for Peirce is a symbol.

Return now to the case of the indexical sign and to Eco's claim against Peirce that in the assertion, "I do not approve of a statement like that," the word "that" still functions indexically when no statement was recently made. On my reading of Peirce, the signification that would survive the nonexistence of a referent for "that" in Eco's purported counterexample is not the indexical signification. It is the symbolic signification that a sentence must have if it is to puzzle or deceive the hearer or reader. We have shifted in these two cases from the indexical and iconic sign of an object to the sign of a concept, reversing the order of the paradoxical shift we make according to Frege from concept to object when we move from the sign "horse" to the sign "the concept horse."<sup>10</sup> Eco's reading takes Peirce to be equating indication with reference. My reading takes Peirce to be distinguishing these. That he is is evident from his definition of a sign in general, which implies that signs of any kind *refer*. But both my reading of Peirce on this point and Eco's are supported by Peirce's concession that "it would be difficult if not impossible, to instance an absolutely pure index, or to find any sign absolutely devoid of the indexical quality."<sup>11</sup> Only a closer reading of what Peirce writes on this matter here and elsewhere will settle whether I am reading him more closely than Eco.

Peirce is not easy to read. He demands to be read closely. For instance, it is not easy to be sure that one has interpreted correctly what he says about the interpretant. It is worth noting that according to Wittgenstein it is only if a text demands close reading, only if it is difficult, like Peirce's, only if it is problematic or obscure or foreign that it can be interpreted. Where we understand something straight off there is no room for interpretation (*Deutung*) in what Wittgenstein regards as the ordinary use of the word. So, despite his admiration for Peirce, he would question from the start his statement that every sign has an interpretant, if that means that we interpret every sign we understand. Setting aside such cases of interpretation as Brendel's interpretation of Schubert's sonata D. 664 or Orson Welles's interpretation of Othello, to interpret, on Wittgenstein's interpretation, is to consider hypotheses or compare one rule for reading with another. To interpret is to think in the sense of doing something. It is not to see what is meant at once, where seeing is a state or condition (*Zustand*), not a deed. To interpret is, in words that only seem to say something different from what has just been said, not to follow a rule blindly.<sup>12</sup>

## II



Having warned against some of the dangers exposed in attempting to answer the question as to how close the experience of language lets close reading get, let us turn to another temptation that some readers of Peirce and Derrida have found themselves unable to resist. I have in mind the inference that because the interpretants, glosses, translations, or iterations of a sign token are not a finite class, no interpretation is barred and reading is ungoverned free

play. Two formal points call to be made about this inference: first, to exclude certain items from being counted does not exclude there being an infinite series of items to be counted. For example, there is an infinite series both of even numbers and of even and odd numbers taken together. Second, the very idea of an infinite class implies certain restrictions, a certain finiteness that needs to be mentioned if one is to refer to deconstruction's "endless slither of signifiers," as Frank Kermode does in his essay, "The Bible as It Was."<sup>13</sup> Foucault reproduces a celebrated passage from Borges in the preface to his *Les mots et les choses*, a title we may think is somewhat one-sidedly glossed (following what we are told was Foucault's own first preference) as *The Order of Things* by its anonymous translator unless we agree that words can be classed among things. Do things simply as things form a class or an order? That is the question raised by the title of the radio program, "The Ghost of Federico Garcia Lorca—Which Can Also Be Used as a Table," and, more famously, by the passage from Borges of which Foucault says:

This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the landmarks of my thought—our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography—breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other. The passage quotes (and I quote) a "certain Chinese encyclopaedia" in which it is written that "animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off looks like flies."

"It is as though this classification is too long a way off from us to count as a classification—unless we admit the paradox of a class of things that are unclassifiable," as Foucault goes on to comment. "In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of a fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking *that*."<sup>14</sup>

But what the fable would show or imply if we could get its drift is that it too has a limitation of its own, however difficult it may be for us to find a footing in it. Our difficulty is that of grasping not the sense or reference of the items in the list, not how to gloss each of them word for word, word for thing, thing for word, thing for thing—our difficulty is one of grasping the *point*. On the one hand, Borges stirs in us a sense of wonderment. But part of that wonderment regarding this cluster of properties—not all of which (e.g., "included in the present classification" and "*et cetera*") belong to what we would consider to be the same logical level or ontological category—is wondering what *purpose* can be served by this grouping. A language, and that means a classifi-

cation, is, as Wittgenstein and Heidegger among many others have reminded us, a form of life. So, although the wonderment of which Foucault writes is aroused by the defamiliarization and distancing of the text from everyday life promoted, in the wake of Russian Formalism, by the New Critics, try as we may with them to peer closely at the words on the page and to isolate them from our and others' social, historical, economic, religious, and other cultures, the latter are, as it were, the aqueous fluid of the eyes by which the words on the page are read. The words on the page say to us, with Emerson's sphinx, "Of thine eye I am eyebeam," where this last word has the wonderful ambiguity we expect of a saying of a sphinx, leaving us oscillating between insight and blindness, between a beam of light, a light to the Gentiles perhaps, and the beam that I am called to remove from my own eye before I attempt to remove the one in my brother's.

Although without remarking on the ambiguity of its last word, Peirce uses Emerson's line to encapsulate the thought that a symbol lights the way for other symbols. What Peirce writes and the cadences of his sentences invite comparison and contrast with the paragraph of *Being and Time* in which Heidegger says that it is wrong to think that word-things have meaning added unto them. On the contrary, "words grow on meanings" ("*Den Bedeutungen wachsen Worte zu*").<sup>15</sup> We are in the vicinity of the metaphor (or *catachresis*) of grafting brought freely into play, but not without license, in at least two senses of that word "license," in Derrida's speculations on classification in *Glas*. Not without license in two senses, because although Derrida is quick to celebrate with Borges and Foucault and Joyce, and others, the wonder that the proliferation of meanings excites, he is only a little less quick to stress that this displacement takes place before the law. No doubt after it also. But not without law, not outwith it, as a Scottish writer to the Signet would say. And some of Derrida's reasons for saying this are the same as, if also different from, things he and we read in Peirce, things that can be fleshed out if we now read the paragraph in which, instead of saying as Heidegger will that "words grow on meanings," Peirce says that signs grow on signs.

Symbols grow. They come into being by development out of other signs, particularly from icons, or from mixed signs partaking of the nature of icons and symbols. We think only in signs. These mental signs are of a mixed nature; the symbol parts of them are called "concepts." If a man makes a new symbol, it is by thoughts involving concepts. So it is only out of symbols that a new symbol can grow. *Omne symbolum de symbolo*. A symbol, once in being, spreads among the peoples; in use and in experience, its meaning grows. Such words as *force*, *law*, *wealth*, *marriage* bear for us very different meanings from those they bore to our barbarous ancestors. The symbol may, with Emerson's sphinx, say to man, "Of thine eye I am eyebeam."<sup>16</sup>

Why does Peirce say that symbols grow by development particularly from iconic signs? An icon for him is a sign that signifies an idea that may be the

predicate of an assertion. It is indispensable for direct communication of an idea. Indirect communication is parasitic upon the direct communication of an idea by an icon or set of icons.<sup>17</sup> This is why Peirce says that the representative quality of an icon is its firstness. Notwithstanding his saying that an icon *signifies* an idea, he says too that it is an idea: "A sign by Firstness is an image of its object and, more strictly speaking, can only be an idea."<sup>18</sup> So much for "more strictly speaking." "But," he goes on to say, writing still more closely, "most strictly speaking, even an idea, except in the sense of a possibility, or firstness [that is, in the sense of a predicate or universal quality], cannot be an Icon." He is not saying first that an iconic sign is an idea and then contradicting himself by saying that an idea cannot be an iconic sign. He is saying perfectly consistently that an idea can be an icon and therefore an icon can be an idea, but as soon as we move from the iconic idea to the interpreting idea (the "interpretant"), as by his definition we must be able to do with any sign whatsoever, we have left iconography. We have left the icon because the icon functions as an image; it represents its object "mainly by similarity."<sup>19</sup> We are removed from its firstness when that first qualitative (one-place) predicate is interpreted by the idea of what is contrasted with it. The contrasted idea and sign is motivated by the first idea.

We have now what Peirce calls "secondness." Firstness is of quality, so Peirce calls its sign a "qualisign." Where a qualisign represents, re-presents, a feeling or impression passively suffered, secondness is the experience of being impressed and interrupted by the occurrence of an object in the "literal" sense of object, something standing in the way, opposed to, resisting, or contrasted with me. It is represented by a "Sign by Contrast." Peirce calls this a "sinsign" because what it signifies occurs only one single time (*sin*, *semel*). One of his examples (though not one that illustrates obviously the experience of an object opposed to the experiencing subject) is the singleness of the replica (token) of the word "the" as distinguished from the word "the" taken as a type, as the same word reiterated in its replicas or tokens. Other examples might be the traditionally secondarized terms of oppositions like writing as opposed to speaking to which deconstruction would do greater justice. Or, if such terms are too conceptual for the indexicality that marks secondariness according to Peirce, perhaps secondariness would be better exemplified by the way (of which more will be said below) in which the opposed terms are both "effects" or indications of telescripture.

So much for firstness and secondness. What is thirdness? As firstness stands to possibility and iconicity, and as secondness stands to existence and indexicality, so thirdness stands to law, conceptuality, or symbolicality. However, Peirce distinguishes among orders of thirdness. By his definition of a sign, all signs partake of thirdness because all sign relations are triadic. Iconicity, indexicality, and symbolicality are all relations among an object, a representation (*representamen*) and an interpretant. But thirdness, as the conceptual or symbolic, is distinguished from the iconic and the indexical that it brings

together. One could risk saying that the conceptual or symbolic is an incomplete symbol in that it collects together qualities that are capable of belonging to an existent object.

We are now in a position to answer the question why Peirce says that symbols grow by development particularly from iconic signs. An index is a sign of an object, whereas an icon is the sign of a felt or impressed quality. It is the quality, not the object that may have the quality, that is generalized in the concept. A symbol brings with it implications of what, having said something, one would be expected to say further, on pain of not being understood. It turns on a conditionality grounded in a convention, a law. A symbol is a "legisign." So it is a type, as opposed to a token, but it is more than that.<sup>20</sup> It is a disposition, what one would be expected to say if a certain condition holds. The *syn* (*syn*), that is to say, the togetherness of symbolism, is this connection of the if-then that is expressed in habitual behavior. Peirce uses the term "habit" not only of human conduct but also of the behavior patterns of animals and even of the laws of physics or chemistry—for instance, the regularities with which lithium behaves under certain specified conditions. Whatever one may say of so-called habits and laws of the inorganic world, human habituality on Peirce's analysis of it is not a must-be but a would-be. Habit allows for the chance that what would normally be expected fails to occur. Peirce is a tychist. His tychism is manifest in the paragraph cited earlier on the growth of symbols, where he notes that "such words as *force*, *law*, *wealth*, *marriage* bear for us very different meanings from those they bore to our barbarous ancestors." Like other human behavior, the human handling of symbols is adaptive. The interpretant, it will be recalled, is a sign of an object that is substituted for another sign referring to the same object, whether that substitution articulates a meaning or changes it. Even where chance intervenes in the change, it is not "mere chance" but chance geared to purpose. Peirce is a pragmatist, "pragmatism" being the term he employs in order to keep at arm's length the pragmatism of, for example, William James, understood as the doctrine that, to state it crudely, truth is "what works." Kept at arm's length also would be the pragmatism of Richard Rorty, who finds the notion of purpose "pretty embarrassing."<sup>21</sup> Purpose or point or teleology, that is to say thirdness,<sup>22</sup> is no less the context for growth of meaning than it is for the interpretation of a sign whose meaning is being spelled out.

Note that thirdness here applies to the will. That the will is involved even with the logical or semantic interpretation of a sign is indicated by the fact that in French "to mean" is *vouloir dire*. The will is more directly engaged by imperative signs like "Ground arms!", which have what Peirce calls an energetic interpretant that is manifested by a muscular or mental effort. A sign may also have an emotional interpretant—for instance, the feelings conveyed by a piece of music.<sup>23</sup>

What Peirce says about the case where meaning is conserved is relevant to our question as to how close the experience of language lets close reading get. For he presents us with the problem of reconciling his assertion that the inter-

pretant of a sign is a sign that becomes “in turn a sign, and so on *ad infinitum*” with his assertion that one may reach “the entire general intended interpretant,”<sup>24</sup> the “very meaning,”<sup>25</sup> an “adequate ultimate interpretation.”<sup>26</sup> The solution of this problem lies in recognizing that all these phrases refer not to a sign, but to a habit:

I do not deny that a concept, proposition, or argument may be a logical interpretant, I only insist that it cannot be the final logical interpretant, for the reason that it is itself a sign of that very kind that has itself a logical interpretant. . . . The concept that is a logical interpretant is only imperfectly so. It somewhat partakes of the nature of a verbal definition, and is as inferior to the habit, and much in the same way, as a verbal definition is inferior to the real definition. The deliberately formed, self-analyzing habit—self-analyzing because it is formed by the aid of the analysis of the exercises that nourished it—is the living definition, the veritable and final logical interpretation. Consequently, the most perfect account of a concept that words can convey will consist in a description of the habit that that concept is calculated to produce. But how otherwise can a habit be described than by a description of the kind of action to which it gives rise, with the specification of the conditions and of the motive?<sup>27</sup>

Consider first this reference to a description of a habit or of the kind of action to which it gives rise under certain conditions. Does this undermine our claim that the ultimate interpretant is a habit, not a sign? I think not, not if a description is a proposition. For Peirce says that although a proposition may be a logical interpretant and therefore a sign, in the first sentence of this passage he denies that a proposition can be a final logical interpretant.

Consider next Peirce's reference here to a self-analyzing habit. To say that a habit is self-analyzing is to say that it is self-critical, because it has learned by experience that it must remain open to the possibility of change. Its ultimacy or finality must be understood in a way that allows it to be provisional. This way of understanding the ultimacy of a habit is met by Peirce's doctrine that signs can be substituted for signs potentially *ad infinitum*. Another way of saying this is to say that interpretation is a disposition of imagination to construct and construe, to read schemas that interpret percepts and concepts in terms of each other, the art or skill or gift of judgment in the sense of a habitual practical or theoretical or practico-theoretical tact. Peirce's mature view of a habit as the “adequate ultimate interpretant” is that this is a *habit of changing habit*. But how, it will be asked, can this metahabituality be ultimate, given that a change of habit is not to be made for the sake of change but in order better to achieve a specific purpose? Would it not be this purpose rather than the habit that is ultimate? However, although the particular purpose would in a sense be ultimate, it would not be an adequate ultimate interpretant. It would not be this because it would be neither an interpretant nor adequate. For example, to describe what happened in Manhattan on September 11, 2001 as the “Destruction of the Temple of Trade” is to interpret that event. However, the reason for



putting that interpretation upon it—say, to suggest that Mammon has become our God—is not an interpretation. Moreover, that reason or any other reason would fall far short of the comprehensiveness of a habit to change habits on the part of the individual—and at the transindividual level it would fall short of the comprehensiveness of what in *The Problem of Christianity*, adapting Peirce, Josiah Royce calls a “community of interpretation.”

### III



Still keeping in mind the question of close reading, let us now sew on to what has been said above about Peirce some further comments about Derrida. Derrida cites and applauds Peirce's definition of the sign as infinitely interpretable. We have shown how for Peirce this does not open the floodgates to any and every reading of a text. At the very least, some readings will be set aside because they fail to survive the auto- and hetero-criticism intrinsic to the ultimate interpretation that for Peirce, we have now seen, is not an ultimate sign, but a habit with regard to signs. Despite what may be the case with ground-level habits, the acquisition of this meta-habit marks not a diminution but an increase of self-criticality and self-exposure to criticism by whatever interpretive society is relevant—the community of chemists, or biologists, or laypersons. It is therefore difficult to see why Eco says that we have here in Peirce “something that cannot find a place within the [Derridean] deconstructive framework,”<sup>28</sup> namely, the extralinguistic or extratextual full stop that Derrida calls a “transcendental signified.” A habit, a disposition, is just not of the category of that to which could belong the kind of presence a transcendently signified entity is envisaged as having. This, therefore, is not the point at which Derrida diverges from Peirce.

The point at which Derrida diverges from Peirce, the point at which deconstruction gets grafted on to semiotics and refuses to be assimilated to pragmatism,<sup>29</sup> is the point at which construction or construal gives way to deconstruction—the point, furthermore, at which, in the light of the passing reference made above to imagination, one should have to ask whether imagination is not only constructive but also deconstructive, either by turns or at one and the very same yet different, deferring moment. The point of Derrida's divergence from Peirce lies elsewhere. Although agreeing with Peirce on the polysemic productivity of meanings, and although no less insistent than he is that this productivity is limited by the grammatical and other socially instituted habits without which one could not form certain purposes or say what one wants to say, Derrida goes a step further in shaking our confidence in the stability of meaning and intention—that is to say, of wanting to say, *vouloir dire*. In this, incidentally, and perhaps to the surprise of some of Derrida's readers, Derrida is closer to Hegel than Peirce. Like Hegel, he brings out how certain writers (Plato, Kant, Condillac, Rousseau, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger,

Saussure, Foucault, Lévi-Strauss, Freud, Lacan, Hegel, Derrida) say something other than what they intend. In order to do this he must read their texts with respect for the apparatus and with recognition of the methodologies of literary and/or historical scholarship: "Without this recognition and this respect, critical production would risk developing in any direction at all and authorize itself to say almost anything."<sup>30</sup>

"But," Derrida immediately adds, "this indispensable guardrail has always only *protected*, it has never *opened*, a reading." While what Derrida refers to as his "principles of reading" demand that reading be close in the sense that it will "recognize all [the] classical exigencies" and "require all the instruments of traditional criticism," the principles are ones that have been instituted, not ones that have been intuited, like those invoked by the "principle of all principles" that purport to constitute the bedrock of Husserlian phenomenology. And what is instituted or constructed can be de-instituted and de-constructed. On a closer reading, a text may deconstruct itself, open itself, and open itself not only to a fuller meaning but to a certain unfullness, to an exteriority that cannot be described in the geometry of the opposition between the inside and the outside, or indeed in terms of any of the other oppositions of classical, classifying philosophy or theory of literary genres, for instance that of the sacred text as opposed to the profane or of *logos endiathetos* as opposed to *logos prophorikos*. Whatever is opened, published, made visible, made plain, made profane, or interpreted (*pretis*, cognate with Sanskrit *prath*, spread abroad, as *logos spermatikos*) is so thanks to the at least momentarily secret and at least in that sense sacred invisible frame: the ground—or unground—that goes without saying. Yet at the same time, this opening is an opening in the sense of an inauguration, an overture, an *ouverture*, in that it makes these oppositions possible. It makes them possible, however, as effects rather than causes or grounds, without these effects being the effects of a foundational first or second cause or ground. And if "ground" be taken in the sense of background as distinguished from the figure raised as a theatrical effect against it, the figure in focus will owe its figure to the ground that is not in focus, because a context is quasi-internal to a text.

Consider again the case of the sign—in particular, the case of the sign in Derrida's close reading of Saussure. The case of the sign is a case in, let us say between scare quotes, the "etymological" sense of the term. It is a *casus*, a fall. But (cheer up!) it is at the same time a rising, a resurrection, and a resource. It is a resource or springing, however, that is without a source, if by source is meant a first origin. Re-source is as close as one gets to a source. Secondness is where we begin. And Derrida would probably say this too if "secondness" is taken in Peirce's technical sense. Peircean firstness, Derrida would probably say, is only an effect of secondness, an effect of a certain relation of production without first cause, production that is the production of meaning only because it is indexical (as Peirce would say), indicative (as Derrida would say), where indication imports the empirical signifying element that Husserl says is in principle excludable from the expression of signified meaning. A deconstructive

close reading makes it difficult to count even up to two, for at the anarchic unground beneath principal effects there is no opposition between first and second, one and two. Likewise, the structuralist construction—construing together—of the signifier and the signified as an opposition of terms constitutive of the sign, turns out on a close reading of Saussure's (or Saussure's students') sentences to be a simple opposition of terms only on the surface.

This opposition depends upon an interlacing of forces that are nonterminating because, to make the point in the manner that it is made in Derrida's adaptation of Peirce, the signified is always already in the position of the signifier.<sup>31</sup> The signified is the meaning aspect of the sign as distinguished from the aspect of the sign as a *phoneme* or *grapheme*—or *cheironomeme* or *morphazememe* or *opseme*, as we could call the nodes of the semiotics of gesture and facial expression, to mention only two of the many varieties of semiotics for which Saussure took the semiotics of language as the model and that Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, and others developed further. But while on the one hand there is no signified semantic meaning unless this meaning can be put in words, that is to say, said through recourse to different signifying marks or sounds—or through the same ones repeated in limiting cases like the Tautology of tautologies to which there is no like, *ehyeh asher ehyeh* (Exod. 3:14)—on the other hand, the same phoneme or grapheme, and so on, which is the signifying aspect of the sign, is already endowed with syntactic and grammatical meaning. To say that it functions as a signifier is to say that it is a sound or mark employed *as belonging to* a syntactic and grammatical system. The “as” of the phrase “as belonging to” implies the “if” of hypotheticality, of what one would be expected to say given a specified condition. And this “if” implies a stretch of time—and of imagination—beyond the present. Indeed, it depresences the present by importing into it an always already pastness and an always already futureness. For human beings, linguistic meaning is discursive, *cursus*, running, passage. But human beings are inclined to fall under the spell of a certain theological idea of linguistic meaning according to which a signifier is face-to-face with its signified in a totally present *nunc stans*. This idea is exemplified by the New Critical conception of the poem as a self-contained verbal icon. And it is exemplified by Saussure's conception of language as a synchronic system in which signification is defined by difference, as chess is constituted by the different powers of its pieces rather than by any positive nonrelational properties of the pieces—for instance, their shape.

Despite the emphasis Saussure puts on the primacy of difference over what he calls the positive, and despite his appeal to what remains constant through the various ways of writing a particular letter of the alphabet to illustrate how systematic differentiation makes possible spoken language, tongue, even he occasionally forgets the distancing differentiation typified in writing where the author is removed from the text. Even Saussure occasionally reverts to “phonologism,” that is, to the supposition that the key to the understanding (*entendre*) of linguistic meaning is hearing (*entendre*) oneself speak where there is supposedly no distance between what the inner ear hears/understands and

what the inner mouth utters. This phonocentrism is also a logocentrism, that is, it presumes that the author is in full control of the meaning present to her or his mind or/and that the meaning, like some despotic Upper-Case Author, is in full control of the would-be lower-case author and his authorial intentions.

Now if the human condition is one in which the presence of the present is interrupted by the past and the future, past and future presents also interfere with each other. This is why the word “etymological” was used above with signaled caution. We have the impression that we may start with the meaning a word has now for us and track back through the history of its use to its first true root meaning. Is that not what etymological dictionaries aim to do? But when we read in square brackets in the *Oxford English Dictionary* that our word “case” derives via Middle English and Old French from the Latin *casus* and that the noun is cognate with the verb *cadere*, to fall, we now have to ask what sense of “fall” is intended. Although we may demonstrate what “fall” means by, say, pointing to the rain, we must also say something if we are to explain that we mean *this*, the falling, not the rain that falls or its wetness, and so on. And the addressee must already understand the point of the pointing. As Wittgenstein has helped us understand, pointing is already a fairly sophisticated speech act, a work of language, a move in a language-game where language is a form of life or a way of being in the world. Speech acts can be performed in writing, as I now, at the time of writing, am performing a constative speech act in writing if I state in my text that the topic of this paragraph in my text is etymology. The topic of this text is reading, therefore textuality—the textuality of texts the close reading of which is facilitated largely by other texts whose authors have left the scene.

To say that language is a form of life is to say at least that the meanings of isolated words can be grasped only in the context of their uses in speech or in writing, as spoken *Worte* or as written *Wörter*. Some texts purport to be both written *Wörter* and spoken *Worte*, notably Holy Scripture that purport to express and not only to report the word—*davar* or *logos*—of God. In reading upper-case Holy Scripture, the otherwise dead letter is reinvested with life. That means at the very least that, like the reading of lower-case scriptures quite generally, the written word is animated by the life of the form of life in which the reader is more or less at home. That form of life might be one in which all communication is carried out in writing, in which case every reader would be a writer. But the writing would be the medium in which the reader would be more or less at home. The sender and recipient of the messages would share a point of view. They would agree on the point of their exchange. Now the point of their exchange might be that of philologists, to reach a scientific conclusion about the etymology of a certain word and what a word meant for the ancient community that used it. The philologists are interested in a question that is historical in the sense in which Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and others use the word *historisch* to refer to objectified chronology. But, as these authors maintain, that interest in objectified historical textual scholarship arises out of the scholars’ historicity, their *Geschichtlichkeit*—that

is to say, it is supported and animated by the contemporary “community of interpretation” to which they belong without their usually reflecting upon it and that defines more or less the shape of the future they imagine for themselves. In this way their scholarly interest in the past—for example, in the meaning of a word on the page of a document written in a so-called dead language—is engaged with their unscholarly, lay, usually unreflectively lived interest in the future. And that future includes the possible uses to which may be put the word they use to translate the Latin word *casus*, namely, the English word “fall.”

So much by way of a simple illustration of how the present and the past and the future are involved linguistically with one another. It may be objected that a people can be interested in what a word means for them now independently of what it meant for their grandparents or what it will mean for their grandchildren, and that it is woolly-headed to suppose that what it meant for their grandparents is inseparable from what it means for them now or will mean for their grandchildren, and that what it will mean for their grandchildren is inseparable from what it means for them now or meant for their grandparents. This denial of temporal overlap may or may not be correct. But if it is correct it is because in making it, time is conceived of as a straight line, and history as *Historie*. The denial of temporal overlap is undermined once it is granted that the view of time as a straight line is an abstraction from our concrete lived experience of the geometry of time and therefore the experience of language is that of a circle or, better, a spiral. This may be a spiral upward or a spiral downward, depending on whether the interpretation of a term is imaginative or unimaginative. Even if it is unimaginative, to interpret is to imagine, in a sense of imagining that is not opposed to true experience.

This, up to a certain point, is the sense in which Husserl says that imagination (*Phantasie*) is the essence of phenomenology.<sup>32</sup> To imagine is at least to ask, “What if?” And that question can be asked of the past, of the present, or of the future. But the temporality of imagination in Husserl’s sense partakes of the structure it has in Kant’s, though the latter’s word for the imagination is usually *Einbildungskraft*, not *Phantasie*. In both transcendental phenomenology and transcendental idealism imagination requires that time—and therefore space—be a continuum, and that things in that continuum be constructed. On both accounts the temporality of imagination is such as to allow for construction or construal.

Now, if imagination is to figure in Derrida’s reading of Peirce’s semiotics it must admit deconstruction into construction and construal. Imagination will “itself” have to be so construed and deconstructed that, no matter how close to the elicitation of a coherent and comprehensive narrative close reading and interpretation would appear to get, that would be the story or history of an effect. The oppositions of felicity and infelicity and of fidelity and infidelity to the facts and to the text under interpretation would be but effects of a happening that goes on under the interpretation or reading, or, unnoticed, through the interpretation or reading. “Writing” is one of Derrida’s names

(though strictly speaking it cannot be a name, not even the name of a name) for what goes on in this space of the spacing that disrupts the continuum of time. For this spacing he sometimes borrows from the *Timaeus* the untermi-nating term *chōra*, which Plato uses of the illegitimate spatial matrix—motherly, though not therefore necessarily female—in which creation takes place.<sup>33</sup> “Writing” as thus employed in the rewriting and rereading of the imagination is not writing as opposed to speaking, as one might be led to think by the gloss given in a chapter in which W. J. T. Mitchell observes that whereas in *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud outlines a science of psychoanalysis of the “laws of expression” that elicits a verbal message from a supposedly “natural” but in fact deceptive pictorial surface, in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* logical analysis runs in the opposite direction, from the supposedly natural verbal surface of everyday language to underlying logico-pictorial structures. Mitchell proposes that

[p]erhaps the redemption of the imagination lies in accepting the fact that we create much of our world out of the dialogue between verbal and pictorial representations, and that our task is not to renounce this dialogue in favor of a direct assault on nature but to see that nature already informs both sides of the conversation.<sup>34</sup>

While this proposal for attaining a “redemption of the imagination” is to be applauded, not least for the prospects it opens onto the work of imagination in the work of art, it has to be noted that it does not cut more deeply than the opposition between pictures and predicates. The reference to “the dialogue between verbal and pictorial representation” is a reference to a dialectical relationship, a symmetry. And the reference to this relationship as one between kinds of representation betrays no suspicion that representation may be a product of an unrepresentable. In the deconstructive rereading of the imagination, redemption would be bought at the price of an unfounding of both pictoriality and verbal predictivity, of representation and of symmetry. That is, imagination would not be redeemed without a loss of security:

Derrida reinstates the ancient figure of the world as text (a figure which, in Renaissance poetics, made nature itself a system of hieroglyphics), but with a new twist. Since the author of this text is no longer with us, or has lost his authority, there is no foundation for the sign, no way of stopping the endless chain of signification.<sup>35</sup>

But even if the author is “with us,” and even if we are being spoken to, “writing” in Derrida’s rewritten and reread quasi-interpretation of archi- or telescripture prior to the book is prephenomenologically, preontologically, and chorically “there.” It is there, however, in a sense that is prior to the sense conveyed by the Latin and the French *est*, and prior to the “is”-ness attributed to the work of art by the New Critics. This sense of being there is better conveyed by *reste*, meaning among other things a “remnant,” a “remainder,” and

therefore a reminder or trace. But *reste* is also the verb cognate with these nouns. In it can be read the *est* of the verb *to be*, but also the *re-* of the re-petition and re-source with which everything starts, as Peirce's sign is always already the sign of a sign. The sign is always resigned. Signification is always resignification, a formula that includes but extends beyond the scope of Norman Kemp Smith's comment on Kant that all cognition is recognition. What interests deconstruction is writing thus reinscribed as repetition and therefore as unoriginal re-source of the simple opposition of writing and speaking made throughout the history of reflection on language and thought from at least as early as that other text of Plato, the *Phaedrus*. If Derrida reinstates the ancient figure of the world as text, he does so by desystematizing that figure, and to do this—or rather to let us learn how system undoes itself—he must not stop, as the just-cited gloss does, at the stage of dialectical neutrality. Nor must he stop at the stage of reversing the order of priority given to speech over writing in another ancient figuration. He must move on to the further stage of intervention where the paleonyms, here “writing” and “reading,” are not opposed to speech but grafted onto it in order to indicate that the opposition is not fundamental, not inscribed on tablets of stone or stane, the material to the name of which it is sometimes said we owe the ontological lexicon of stance, substance, standing, understanding, sistance, existence, *histemi*, *histine*, and so on, whether or not this etymology results from an alleged confusion in the course of the experience of language, a slip of the tongue, a lapse from wisdom into error.

#### IV



Not to bring our discussion to a close on a downbeat, note that although the credentials of the classical metaphysical oppositions are being called into question, they are being called into question by what makes them possible as theatrical, that is to say, artful effects. Further, they in turn are necessary to the work of deconstruction itself, allowance being made for the strange identity of deconstruction's itself-ness. The “other side” of Derrida's extrapolation of Peirce is that, no more than the rest of us, can Derrida get by without these oppositions—for instance, the opposition between protection and opening and between signifier and signified. Indeed, his extrapolation exploits the opposition between signifier and signified, which is not articulated in Peirce's definition of the sign, in order to shake the assumption that the signifier is an epiphenomenon of the signified and to advance the hypothesis that the movement in which what is signified becomes a sign according to Peirce's formula is a movement of tracing telegraphed through the signifier to the signified.

Another indispensable opposition it is high time we turned to is the one Derrida himself draws between polysemy and dissemination.<sup>36</sup> Much of what has been said in this chapter, especially what has been said in it in the context

of Peirce's account of signs, will have seemed to be about polysemy, that is to say, about the multiplication of meanings such as is pursued by the infinite midrashic imagination. But even the infinite midrashic imagination is logocentric if the Augustinian response to the commandment "Be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:22, 28) is an open-ended catena of exegeses of an original founding revelation vouchsafed on Sinai.<sup>37</sup> For "there is no foundation for the sign" not only because there is "no way of stopping the endless chain of signification"; there is no foundation for the sign because semiology is an effect of the dissemiology that intruded upon our reflections when we linked onto Peirce's account of the sign and the interpretant the chain of Derridian signifiers—deconstruction, difference, supplement, trace, remainder, archi-scripture, and so on.

At that moment we passed from an emphasis upon questions of interpretation or hermeneutics, whether it be of the spoken word with its phoneme or the written word with its graphemes and units of reading that we might call "anagnosemes," where *anagnōsis* means reading but also knowing again or recognition, so that the prefix "ana-" is a symptom of the ancient tradition of regarding the written and read word as secondary to the spoken. From that moment on, the emphasis was placed on the way in which into all these memes of semiotics, and the sememe itself, the unit we call a "sign," with its inbuilt construing of a signifying sound or mark opposed to a signified meaning, there intervenes the disseme. The disseme would be the disunifying force of dissemination. Dissemination is not simply the history of the development of meaning toward increased richness or poverty by metaphor, analogy, and etymology, whether the etymology be deemed true or false. Dissemination would be the de-signing of the sign, de-signation of designation, without which there would be no opposition of the literal and the metaphorical, the true and the false, wisdom and stupidity, the same and the other. And without the possibility of making these oppositions, there could be no experience whatsoever, not where experience is the acquisition of wisdom as the remembering of lessons learned in the past so that they are readily available for future eventualities, such wisdom as we owe to the experience of language, such wisdom as we obtain by close reading thanks to the distance reading, the grace of the teletext traced like a watermark on the paper we read, for example, the chapter you have now finished reading—except for a very brief but unendingly reiterable postscript.

## V



In a contribution to a volume on *Art and Experience* it will not come amiss if to what has been written above concerning the experience of language be added by way of postscript an indication of how that experience may be reread following a hint given at the beginning of the first section. In this postreading



the experience of language interpreted as language's *Erfahrung*—the experience, learning, wisdom, and cunning acquired by language through its having traveled so far—becomes what is experienced in the sense of what is *erlebt* by the speaker or writer. It becomes the object of an *Erlebnis*. The objecthood of this object may be that of scientific investigation. In this case, the travel and travail of language's experience are regarded as having taken place in chronological time, the time of *Historie*. But if within the same temporality the etymological wanderings of language are allowed to strike us with wonder, the artifact of language gets regarded as a huge work of art. Huge to the degree that language is regarded as the web of languages whose crossings are commemorated in those entries that dictionaries put between square brackets. Astonishment at the inventiveness and humor displayed by the leaps and bounds and bindings recollected there is not foreign to the scientific study of language. The work of science quite generally does not exclude the aesthetic responsiveness called for and called forth by the work of art. Without this aesthetic sensibility, science does not begin to work. For without it, science is without imagination and therefore incapable of becoming experience in that further sense of the word conveyed by the Latin *experientia* and still very alive in the French. *Expérience* is experiment. And it is to experience as experiment that the work of art moves when it is no longer passive undergoing but active going over (*Übergehen*), putting over (*Übersetzung*), translation (*Übersetzung*), as the work of art is for its maker and its recreative recipient. The genius, wisdom, and cunning of language allow the experience of language to be at one and the same time *épreuve* as passive suffering and *épreuve* as active test. This is precisely what Peirce is saying when he writes of the habit of dehabitualization. The artfulness of the experience of language is art as work of imagination that is both made work and work in the making. But telescriptural imagination is also an unmaking and an undoing. It unmakes and undoes simple oppositions, such oppositions as that of script to voice and of science to art. It calls into question the fundamentality of the phenomenological imagination. Whereas the variations in imagination that phenomenology perform have in view the *telos* of an invariant essence, the telescriptural imagination distances itself from teleology, essence, and distinct division, not because their alleged fundamentality can be derived from something more fundamental, but because it is a kind of illusion. It is a transcendental illusion—that is to say, it is an illusion that will persist despite the recognition that it is quasi-transcendentally conditioned by anarchic scripture. This is why Philo is writing about interpretation and meaning, not dissemination and force when he writes of Abraham that

he wishes you to think of God who cannot be shown, as severing through the Severer of all things, that is his Word, the whole succession of things material and immaterial whose natures appear to us to be knitted together and united. That severing Word whetted to an edge of utmost sharpness never ceases to divide. . . . So it divided . . . the soul into rational and non-rational, speech into true and false, sense into presentations where the object is real and apprehended, and presentations where it is not.<sup>38</sup>

Imagination, we said, is the locus in which no division is made between presentations where the object is real and apprehended, and presentations where it is not. But it is also the locus in which sharp, clear, and distinct divisions between opposites are made, either by the phenomenologist who asseverates albeit without the field of natural and metaphysical factuality, or by the Severer, the audible *Logos* or the visible Adam whom the invisible God appoints to set the forms of created things "opposite each other." But "The birds He left undivided, for incorporeal and divine forms of knowledge cannot be divided into conflicting opposites." The birds here referred to are the pigeon and the turtledove of Genesis (15:9): the pigeon that feeds on the earth and represents human reason, but also and especially the dove that differs from the pigeon as the genus differs from the species and as the archetype differs from the copy. The dove soars and loves secrecy—it symbolizes distance. But its distance, as also the distance of the *telos* Hegel calls "absolute knowledge," is haunted by the distance spelled out in telescripture. Telescripture is what takes one's breath away, dispirits the spirit of God's spell. When in the experience of a sudden fright one's breath is, as we say paradoxically, taken away, there occurs a sharp intake of breath. This—for instance, the first breath drawn by the child surprised by its birth—is a necessary condition for breathing out, a necessary condition for our doubly genitive experience of language's experience right up until, unsurprised by death, we are uttered by the purely consonantal and consequently, like YHWH, unpronounceable subscript *gl*, which, not yet itself a word, is yet a fragment of the word *glas*, signifying among a multitude of other things death-knell and voice, that by which all words are either spoken or consigned to silence. The distance of the telescript is the distance that defers death by being inscription waiting for the next breath. It is what leaves us openmouthed when we read Holy Scripture and when we ascribe to the secular text the secret sacredness of a verbal icon. It is what, when we are faced by any work of art, leaves us with a sense of its essential incompleteness, a sense of unending.

Hot for secrets, our only conversation may be with guardians who know less and see less than we can; and our sole hope and pleasure is in the perception of a momentary radiance, before the door of disappointment is finally shut on us.<sup>39</sup>

## NOTES



1. Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 144.

2. Frank Kermode, *The Romantic Image* (New York: Random House, 1964, pp. 127–28), cited by Frank Lentricchia in *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 6.

3. C. S. Peirce, *Collected Papers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931–58), 2:303.

4. Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 38.
5. Peirce, op. cit., 2:304.
6. Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), pp. 115–16.
7. Peirce, op. cit., 2:247.
8. Ibid., 2:304.
9. Ibid., 2:276.
10. Gottlob Frege, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Peter Geach (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), pp. 45–46.
11. Peirce, op. cit., 2:306.
12. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), pp. 201, 212.
13. Frank Kermode, *Pleasing Myself: From Beowulf to Philip Roth* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin Press, 2001), p. 160.
14. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Tavistock, 1970), p. xv.
15. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robertson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962); trans. J. Stambaugh (reprint, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 161.
16. Peirce, op. cit., 2:302.
17. Ibid., 2:278.
18. Ibid., 2:276.
19. Why only mainly? Perhaps because iconicity is a distinguishable but not separable aspect of signification along with indexicality and symbolism.
20. Douglas Greenlee, *Peirce's Concept of Sign* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), p. 95.
21. Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, op. cit., p. 38.
22. Peirce, op. cit., 2:276.
23. Ibid., 5:475.
24. Ibid., 5:179.
25. Ibid., 5:427.
26. Ibid., 5:504.
27. Ibid., 5:491.
28. Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, op. cit., p. 39.
29. Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 119.
30. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. C. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 158.
31. Ibid., p. 73.
32. See, for example, Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (London: Allen & Unwin, 1931), §70, which infers that "the element which makes up the life of phenomenology as of all eidetic science is 'fiction'. . . ."
33. Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. J. P. Leavey, Jr., and R. Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 134.
34. W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 46.
35. Ibid., p. 29.
36. Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. A. Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 329.

37. David Stern, "Midrash and Indeterminacy," *Critical Inquiry* 15 (autumn 1988): 145, 154; St. Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. J. K. Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 1960), p. 358.

38. Philo, "Who Is the Heir of Divine Things," in *Philo*, 10 vols., trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker (London: Heinemann, 1932), 4:348–49.

39. Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*, op. cit., p. 145.

### CHAPTER THREE

# Experiencing Nature and Experiencing Art



T. J. DIFFEY

Still seminal in contemporary analytical aesthetics is Kant's account of the aesthetic judgment. In spite of its great power and influence, I do not believe that it offers us an adequate model to account for what it is to experience a work of art. Put more brutally, the Kantian paradigm distorts that experience. For one thing, it treats the work of art as if it were a natural object. If this claim is implausible, for I know of at least one contemporary philosopher who would dispute it, the claim that I want to press is that, regardless of what Kant himself thought, we should reject the idea that the judgment of beauty that he theorizes applies indifferently to art and nature. My intuition, or temptation, is to lean hard on the differences between what it is to experience a work of art and the experience of nature, and to hold that what I am calling the Kantian paradigm applies better to nature than it does to art. If our subject is the beauty of nature, we do well at least to consider Kant's account of beauty; if our subject is art and the experience of art, I doubt if Kant, except in so far as we can link his account of aesthetic ideas with artistic imagination, has much to offer us.

If the primary or essential value of art consists in its being the prime locus of aesthetic experience, in the Kantian sense of a disinterested, necessary, and universally demandable pleasure, we could not do justice to those aspects of art that fall outside these limits. They would come to seem, as indeed thanks to the influence of the Kantian paradigm I think they have, secondary or peripheral. For example, disinterested pleasure does not seem strong enough by itself to explain the power of art when we think of art in terms of its power to confer glory on artists and nations. Kantian beauty does not explain why artists have justifiably seen in their art a means to immortality and why

nation-states hold art to be a major source of national glory, pride, and patriotism. Not everything about art is to be understood from the point of view of the autonomous consumer or aesthete, and if not everything, then exactly how important is this aspect of art, highlighted as it is in our aesthetics? If we begin to philosophize about the experiences of art and of nature within the framework of a Kantian aesthetics, we are liable to slip into such questions as whose experiences and from what standpoint? And since the Kantian answer seems to be that we are talking about the experience of a disinterested rational being who in experiencing the beautiful is freed to a large extent from the commitments and demands of practical life, what we seem to be talking about is the experience of the culturally or historically unlocated spectator. Does art deserve that fate? This may well seem unfair to Kant. After all, he thinks that the beautiful is a symbol for the morally good, but interestingly and remote from modern sensibilities, he seems to think that it is the capacity to respond to natural beauty that is a sign of a morally good character, and not the capacity to respond to the beauty of a work of art.

I am not saying that the power to confer honor, fame, glory, even immortality, are necessarily estimable features of art, though we should not move to judgment before we have understood them; and it is lamentable that contemporary philosophy of art fails to address these aspects of art. Here I am merely claiming that it is the power of the Kantian paradigm that has put them beyond the pale of philosophical investigation. It goes against entrenched notions of the autonomy of art, which are either Kant's, or which, and perhaps more likely, have been foisted upon him, to observe rather than dismiss or, as is common, to overlook the fact that historically and standardly art was generally placed in the service of something else, notably religions. I am curious to know, though I do not explore the question here, what it is about art that gives it that power to take, for example, Christianity into the very hearts and souls of its audiences. Propaganda has a bad name. It is generally thought of negatively, as something malign, but we should be more curious than we are concerning exactly what it is about the nature of art that permits it to have the power to influence.

I have been assuming in these remarks that Kant's aesthetics gives us too circumscribed a view of the power of fine art, but when we come to consider the decorative and applied arts we shall find that these are even more badly served where that aesthetics holds sway. I may lament, then, that we are inattentive to art when it is in the service of something else, and these remarks can be enlarged beyond reference to religions—consider, for example, art in the service of the portrait or the commemorative functions of art—but I don't raise a similar protest about the release of art from another service. Art has been freed, namely, from service to the ideal of beauty, nature has not, and this of course would be another reason for chafing at the continuing influence of Kant's aesthetics. For centuries, art in the West in practice and in theory aimed at the creation of beauty, but notoriously or trivially (depending upon where one's own art preferences lie) beauty is no longer the aim of art.

This is not to deny that modern works of art *can* be beautiful; it is to say only that they do not *have to be beautiful* in order to be art. Beauty is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of art. This is a commonplace teaching in contemporary philosophical aesthetics and I don't intend to discuss it further here. I am interested rather in a certain consequence that the doctrine has, if true—namely, that it breaks any symmetry there might once have been between the aesthetics of art and the aesthetics of nature. I have put the point thus, in terms of “the aesthetics of” rather than speak of the aesthetic experience or aesthetic value of art and of nature. For my topic, expressed of course in my title, is “Experiencing Nature and Experiencing Art.” But if we speak of *experiencing* nature and *experiencing* art, how do talk of *aesthetic* experience and *aesthetic* satisfaction have the right to intrude, to come upon the scene? If we are to bring them in, this should be as a premise in an argued case; that is, we ought to be explicit in showing that to experience art is necessarily to have an aesthetic experience. But I do not want to be too quick to say this. Rather, at the *beginning* of the inquiry, I think we should heed the wise words of George Dickie:

We must give up equating proper experience of all works of art with the aesthetic experience of them, if we mean by “aesthetic experience” that it is disinterested or detached experience. The historical connection between the notion of aesthetic experience and the notion of disinterestedness is so strong that I doubt that the two can be effectively separated. Consequently, I think the best thing to do is give up using the term “aesthetic experience” as the generic term for the experience of art. It is best, I think, simply to use the term, “the experience of art” for the experience of art. This neutral way of speaking does not dictate that certain aspects of certain works of art are not proper candidates for experiencing when one looks at, listens to, attends to, etc., those works. With this neutral way of speaking, we are free to describe our experiences of art as they actually occur.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, it will seem disingenuous to ask how, when we inquire into the experience of art and of nature, the topic of the aesthetic and its associated concepts get into the story. For it has been precisely the business of aesthetics, particularly in its original eighteenth-century foundational formulation, to put them there, as indeed is recognized in Dickie's remarks.

Suppose aesthetics historically was inclined to treat art and nature as of a piece or a unity. Now what I am more struck by is their discontinuity. But rather than dogmatically assert or deny that, from the point of view of aesthetics, art and nature must be one, this is a question to be considered and explored. I certainly start with the intuition, or prejudice, however, that nature and art are of such a different character that in the experiencing of them it will be the differences more than the similarities that will be salient. By “art” I shall understand the arts such as music, literature, painting. My idea is that listening to a piece of music is not to be included in the same category as, say, walking in the countryside. Why choose to compare the experience of music and

walking in the countryside rather than music with thinking out a theorem in geometry? Arnold Berleant says:

Few would deny the possibility of obtaining aesthetic satisfaction from both works of art and from nature, customarily in the case of the first and under certain conditions in the other. But what sort of satisfaction is this, and is it the same kind in nature as in art?

The usual course, perhaps the most intuitively obvious, is to recognize that aesthetic value exists in both domains but for historical and philosophical reasons to find, like Diffey and Carlson, that the kind of appreciation each encourages is essentially different.<sup>2</sup>

Two comments might be made in response to these remarks. First, we can obtain aesthetic satisfaction from things that are neither art nor nature, such as mathematics, and second, if we are to introduce the phrase “aesthetic value” we should have good reasons to do so. Of course, it is not a criticism of what Berleant says to point out that something that is neither art nor nature may be of aesthetic interest. The relevance of the remark is rather to guard against the tyranny of dichotomous thinking, particularly since here I shall be concerned with exploring the “art/nature” dichotomy.

Indeed, in the modern world, the dichotomy between art and nature, in terms of what we experience—that is, the objects of our experience—must increasingly be called into question, in spite of my predilection to look for clear differences between art and nature. It is one thing to stress the differences between, say, attending a performance of *King Lear* and looking out to sea across a coastal marsh, and I’d be hard put to say what the beauty of the view from Box Hill has to do with Berg’s *Lulu*. But we also must remember that much of what we value in our environment is made by us. Some woodlands, for example, are worked on by landscape artists and consultants; they are made as art is made. The growing use of environmental artists along with the increasing difficulty in disentangling town and country, categories inherited from earlier times, are forcing us to see, if we insist on some conceptual distinction between art and nature, nevertheless a continuum rather than a gap, such that art and nature will be the ideal extremes, rarely purely instantiated, between which most items in our possible experience will have something of both. Something may be more art and less nature, or more nature and less art. As Andrew Forge has warned, “the boundaries have shifted in such a way that one can’t talk about art and nature as if they were two separate domains.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, it begins to look as if the concept of natural beauty, once we dismiss the rarely attainable ideal of that which is free from human intervention, is itself an aesthetic concept. Or as Nelson Goodman claims: “That nature imitates art is too timid a dictum. Nature is a product of art and discourse.”<sup>4</sup> But even this pronouncement I suspect is too timid if, in the modern world, art and nature are losing their distinctiveness and are, if not replaced, then diminishing in our experience of meeting the demand for a holistic response to the environment that is, as it were, absorbing both. A way to put this in terms of



parochial English experience, for example, is to ask, what, in what is now called the heritage, is art and what is nature?

The asymmetry we now have in our aesthetics I suggest is this. We have given up speaking of the beautiful in art but not speaking or thinking of the beauty of nature. (In this chapter I am taking the phrases "the beauty of nature" and "natural beauty" as equivalent in meaning, though an analysis of their meanings would show that there are some distinctions to be drawn here.) If we lost interest in the beauty of nature we would, by definition, no longer respond to nature aesthetically, but not to be interested in the beauty of art is not necessarily to lose interest in art, nor, to keep the argument symmetrical, necessarily to lose aesthetic interest in art. For as has often been pointed out, I may be as well responding to say the terrible in art as to the beautiful. And often works of art that we value not for their beauty but for certain other qualities were created long ago. For example, it is sometimes triumphantly exclaimed, we don't go to *King Lear* for its beauty.

However, these considerations show that the asymmetry that I pretended to between modern art, which is no longer essentially concerned with the beautiful, and nature, which we continue to value for its beauty, cannot hold. The claim that there is that asymmetry must be false, at least in that simple-minded form that sees a radical disjunct between nature and *modern* art, if it now turns out that some traditional works of art, let alone modern ones, need not be beautiful. Moreover, is our aesthetic response to nature confined to the beauty of nature? Aldo Leopold in his criticisms of a picturesque aesthetics of nature sought to show that we can certainly value aesthetically portions of nature not conventionally perceived as beautiful, such as the plains of Kansas, and, one might add, the introduction of the sublime into aesthetic theory thereby recognized that the beauty of nature did not exhaust the character of our aesthetic interest in it. Nevertheless, a qualified asymmetry between art and nature, I believe, still holds: namely, in the case of art, where it is obvious that a work, on account of its treatment of its subject matter, is not a matter of delight or charm, so cannot be described in the ordinary sense as "beautiful." Yet "beautiful" in aesthetic theory is sometimes used not as in, say, the example of Fragonard's "The Swing," where we are speaking of the beauty of the representation, but as a synonym for "good art" or "artistic excellence." Munch's "The Scream" is not a beautiful picture in the sense that Fragonard's picture is. Its subject matter is not charming or delightful but harrowing, yet both are good pictures, good as art. If this is right, it means that Fragonard's picture is beautiful in two senses, and Munch's in only one.

If I am right that some theorists have toyed with the idea of using "beautiful" as a synonym for aesthetic or artistic excellence, that use is confined to art and does not apply to nature. So in modified form I claim there to be the following asymmetry between art and nature: There is nothing in the aesthetics of nature comparable to the evaluation of works of art. You can have something that is good as art and that is thoroughly disturbing, and so not beautiful in the sense that the Fragonard picture is beautiful. But the Munch is

beautiful art in the sense that, though disturbing, it is very good art and not botched. Indeed, disturbing works need to be good art in order to have the power to disturb. Or another way to put this would be to say that there is an internal connection between the idea of art and of good art, whereas it does not make sense to speak of "good nature," while we can of course speak of "beautiful nature."

B. C. Nath, reviewing an earlier essay of mine on the topic of natural beauty, thought that it was an objection to my position that "the major observation by Aristotle remains unanswered: How to contradict his view that the ugly in nature appears beautiful in art? The specific beauty of art lies with representational quality."<sup>5</sup> But I don't think I am obliged to contradict Aristotle on this point. First, if I am right, much art that is valued is not valued for its beauty. As we shall see when we come to our discussion below of Hegel, Hegel challenges the time-honored view that the value of art consists in its mimetic character, and I suggest that modern art and aesthetics in this matter follow Hegel. Second, I don't rule out that artists may present in their works that which when seen in nature is ugly. I don't rule it out, but it needs to be noticed that, notwithstanding Aristotle's great authority, before we can rule it in, attention to a number of philosophical issues is required. I shall not discuss them in detail here but shall briefly indicate what I think they are.

First, there is Collingwood's claim to be considered: "Nothing in nature is ugly," he proclaims,

[when] we deny that a natural object is beautiful we are reflecting not upon it but upon ourselves. As such, every natural object is equally beautiful; God takes as much pleasure in the turbot and the hippopotamus as in the nightingale and the lion; his handiwork is a sufficient guarantee of perfection, and if we fail to see that perfection the fault is our own.<sup>6</sup>

Second, when artists render things in their work that in nature would be ugly, they may, to make Schopenhauer's point, be getting us to see those things as they essentially appear, freed from the demands of our own wills and purposes. And it may be this freshness of perception, that which is freshly perceived in the work and that many authorities have valued in art, to which beauty is attributed. Third, there is Sartre's claim that there is a radical discontinuity between a real object and what is imaged or imagined in a picture. If a work of art consists of images, and the image is, in Sartre's sense, unreal, then the work of art is not an object of experience but of imagination. In Collingwood's terms, in viewing a picture I recreate in my imagination the work the artist has done. These matters are controversial, but if on the right lines, they do serve to suggest some pretty radical differences opening up between the experience of art and the experience of nature. Fourth, there is the technical difficulty concerning by what criteria of identity can we establish that the toad in the picture is the very same toad as the toad that is in my garden, but an identity is required here if it is to be true that the ugly toad in the garden is the beautiful toad in the picture. Finally, the distinction needs to be consid-

ered between “this is a picture of a beautiful toad (which, when seen in nature, would look ugly)” and “this is a beautiful picture of a toad (a toad that, when seen in nature, would look ugly).”

We still use the phrase “natural beauty” easily enough, though it stands in need of philosophical analysis and is by no means free of complications. For example, how “natural” is natural beauty? Does “natural” here mean “without human intervention” or “*appearing* untouched by human intervention”? The sense of “nature” implied in “natural beauty” is the thought of nature as unspoiled, being free from the intrusion of human agency. In a broad sense of “nature,” Andrew Brennan says, “Products and events are natural . . . when their existence is not dependent on a certain kind of human management, production or interference.”<sup>7</sup> Robert Elliot in his article, “Faking Nature,”<sup>8</sup> says that for the purposes of his present argument he will take it that “natural” means something like “unmodified by human activity.” “Obviously some areas will be more natural than others according to the degree to which they have been shaped by human hand. Indeed most rural landscapes will, on this view, count as nonnatural to a very high degree.”<sup>9</sup> “Natural beauty,” I believe, is ambiguous as between that which looks uncreated by human agency and that which really is uncreated by such agency. In so far as such beauty is that of what is free of human agency—for example, the beauty of the stars or of wilderness—it is becoming increasingly inaccessible to and vestigial in human experience.

Many things that we are inclined to think of as naturally beautiful, such as the Sussex Downs, in their present appearance are almost entirely the product of human agency. But in designating something as naturally beautiful, the human role in its creation is something that we have chosen not to foreground or to consider. When we respond to something as naturally beautiful we think of it, I suggest, as free of human agency, deliberation, or design, while intellectually we know that this is not so. When our thought is jogged on the point, we see quickly enough that scarcely anything on the planet Earth is free of human intervention. Nevertheless we are speaking of the look of a thing, not its history.

There is a difference between “is untouched by human agency” and “looks untouched by human agency.” To say that the Downs in their present form are the production of human agency is not to say that they thereby have the look of a made thing. How they now look aesthetically is not the outcome of an intentional or deliberative process aiming at just that design that we see when we contemplate the view. There has been human intervention, but not for the purpose of creating the aesthetic character of the Downs that we now enjoy, nor is that manifest in our aesthetic awareness of them. We are pretty lax, however, in requiring that human agency must never be manifest in natural beauty. We don’t, for example, mind the presence of the odd windmill or two, preferably of the ancient variety (a pair stand on the Sussex Downs near my home), but we *do* mind modern wind farms. They are too evidently human artifacts, but an old mill or two, if anything, enhance the natural beauty of the

scene. And many other examples could be given, such as a bridge improving the look of or bringing out the beauty of a river.

Yet “does not look created by human agency” is not an exact-enough analysis of “natural beauty,” for there is a difference between this and “does not look spoiled by human agency.” A natural-looking landscape will in all probability have been created by, but need not be spoiled by, human agency. On the contrary, it may have been brought to perfection by human intervention. This would be the case with many eighteenth-century landscaped parks. Although the two ideas are not the same, one can see how they can easily be confused, when it is thought or assumed that all human intervention in nature is for the worse. This is roughly the attitude of nature romanticism and opposed by defenders, especially philosophers, of science.

The suggestion that natural beauty looks to be free of human agency implies that natural beauty is understood in negative terms, that it constitutes a kind of default or fall-back ideal, that nature is fine until spoiled by humans. This gets expressed in art and literature in terms of the conflict between the countryside and the city. “In poetry and painting,” John Barrell remarks, “the countryside comes to take on the simply negative virtue of not being the city.”<sup>10</sup> But this, though true, easily obscures an important distinction: I may value something because I think it is unspoiled by humans, and express that value by thinking of it as beautiful without in fact attending very carefully to the look of the thing or place at all. It is sufficient, as it were, that humans have not wreaked havoc there to think that the place is therefore beautiful. In addition to the fact that there has not been human intervention at a certain spot, and does not look to have been, it may or may not look *beautiful too*. Thus there may be the lazy attribution of *natural* beauty to such a place, or the justified attribution of *natural beauty* to something that really merits that judgment. I, at any rate in my sentimental youth, overlooked this distinction.

But, however it is to be understood philosophically, at least the phrase “natural beauty” gets used in everyday life: for example, in Britain we have designated areas of “outstanding natural beauty.” But the asymmetry between nature and art that I am exploring is reflected in the fact that we don’t seem to have much use for the correlative phrase, “artistic beauty.” The new Tate Gallery, for example, has not been designated for the reception of works of artistic beauty. We can, of course, attach sense to the phrase if we have to, but it would be used, if at all—no pun intended—as a term of art, as the equivalent, say, to “excellence as art.” Gadamer writes as if there were the asymmetry I am claiming, when he says

in regard to beauty the priority of nature is unquestioned. Art may take advantage of gaps within the formed whole of the natural order to perfect the beauties of nature given in the order of being. But that certainly does not mean that “beauty” is to be found in the first place and primarily in art. As long as the order of being is seen itself as divine or as God’s creation—and the latter is the case until the eighteenth century—the exceptional case of art can be seen only within the framework of this order of being.<sup>11</sup>

We have to be careful here, since the passage I have quoted is introduced with the following remarks: "As we can see, this kind of definition of the beautiful is a universal ontological one. Nature and art are not here in antithesis to each other. This means, of course, that in regard to beauty the priority of nature is unquestioned." And I am looking for, if not an antithesis between art and nature, then an asymmetry. But the kind of definition of beauty Gadamer is talking about is "the close connection between the idea of the beautiful and that of the teleological order of being, . . . the Pythagorean and Platonic concept of measure." Of course, art is not necessarily in antithesis to this, but with this qualification noted, the first passage I quoted from Gadamer suggests the idea that when nature and art were both thought of as "created"—nature by God and art by human beings—it was natural to think of natural and artistic beauty as two sorts or kinds belonging to the same species. But we no longer think in that way. This coupling of art and nature via the shared ground of beauty has been broken.

This point is not yet quite correctly formulated. For although the idea of a work of art as made or fabricated was commonplace from the time of Plato and Aristotle, the idea of the work of art as *created* takes on a new and mysterious resonance with the Romantics. So while a continuous aesthetics of art and nature prevailed, the idea of the artist as special creator or godlike figure, while to be found in some Renaissance writing, is not foregrounded until the development of European Romanticism. The duty of the artist to copy nature is more stressed than the distinctive or original genius of the artist. But the idea of nature as God's creation, as any kind of creation, has been steadily losing ground since the eighteenth century. So we are now left with the (uncreated) beauty of nature and the created work of art that may well engage our interest—for example, for its expressiveness—without any claim having or needing to be made for its beauty.

I believe the fracture here between an older tradition that treats of the continuity or similarity of art and nature and the newer tendency from the nineteenth century onwards to treat art and nature as discrepant is exemplified in the striking differences between Kant's aesthetics and Hegel's. The traditional continuity between art and nature, to be found in Kant's aesthetics, is in terms of their beauty; the modern discontinuity between art and nature is in terms of art, on account of its being made or created through the peculiar power of the imagination, having a special status, while nature, according to our modern secularism, though contingently or possibly beautiful, is something unmade and brutely there or given.

Herman Parret, in his article on Kant, brings out well the continuity, indeed the unity for Kant of artistic and natural beauty, and makes a better job than I have just done in dealing with the difference I have been trying to labor between uncreated nature and created art. (Of course, for Kant it is *as if* beautiful nature were designed by God, but this is not a thesis that can be articulated and so put firmly within the epistemological reach of our understanding.) Parret writes:

It is a common idea in contemporary aesthetics that the artist “creates” new worlds, new “objects” which are added to the assortment of things and states of affairs in the existing world. The artist, we believe, is a “creator” because he produces culture, not because he “transforms” nature. In general, Kant is not very sympathetic to this idea of a new reality which is added to existing nature. As a result, artistic beauty and natural beauty cannot be separated, on Kant’s view, because it is a matter of one and the same beauty: there is only a single type of aesthetic judgment whether the beautiful or the sublime is natural or artistic. . . . The creative genius does not create *ex nihilo*: he does not add to nature; he is, rather, the voice of nature.<sup>12</sup>

But Hegel on the other hand draws a distinction in kind between the beauty of art and the beauty of nature. Hegel’s interest is in the philosophy of fine art and he uses the term “aesthetic” in conformity with this restriction; that is, he uses it as a synonym for the philosophy of fine art. By this “expression we at once exclude *the beauty of Nature*.”<sup>13</sup> Hegel begins by *asserting* (not demonstrating) “that artistic beauty stands *higher* than nature. For the beauty of art is the beauty that is born—born again, that is—of the mind” (Hegel, p. 4). He elaborates that “even a silly fancy such as may pass through a man’s head is *higher* than any product of nature; for such a fancy must at least be characterized by intellectual being and by freedom” (Hegel, p. 4).

Mind and its artistic beauty stand *higher* than natural beauty, but “higher,” Hegel concedes, “is an utterly indefinite expression.” The distinction is not purely quantitative or simply relative:

Mind, and mind only, is capable of truth, and comprehends in itself all that is, so that whatever is beautiful can only be really and truly beautiful as partaking in the higher element and as created thereby. In this sense the beauty of nature reveals itself as but a reflection of the beauty which belongs to the mind, as an imperfect, incomplete mode of being, as a mode whose really substantial element is contained in the mind itself. (Hegel, p. 4)

“No one has taken it into his head,” Hegel says, “. . . to attempt to make a science, a systematic account of these beauties. . . . In dealing with natural beauty we find ourselves too open to *vagueness*, and too destitute of a *criterion*; for which reason such a review would have little interest” (p. 5). As Michael Inwood puts it: “For Hegel, spirit evolves out of nature, which is inferior in beauty to the products of spirit, and is only seen as beautiful in the light of such products.”<sup>14</sup>

Stephen Bungay brings out very well how Hegel sees the differences, what I am calling the “discontinuities,” between art and nature. Hegel, he says, represents “a radical rejection of the ancient notion that art is ‘mimesis,’ the imitation of nature, and instead defines the source of art as human freedom”:

Three things should be clear . . . : first, that Hegel bans the concept of mimesis from aesthetics; second, that art is a product of human freedom, and stands in contrast with nature; and third, that nature can be beautiful only if

it is treated as if it were a work of art, that is as if it were a human product. This means that things which are not art can have certain aesthetic effects when they are viewed as if they were.<sup>15</sup>

Wittgenstein observed:

A work of art forces us—as one might say—to see it in the right perspective but, in the absence of art, the object is just a fragment of nature like any other; we may exalt it through our enthusiasm but that does not give anyone else the right to confront us with it. (I keep thinking of one of those insipid snapshots of a piece of scenery which is of interest for the man who took it because he was there himself and experienced something; but someone else will quite justifiably look at it coldly, in so far as it is ever justifiable to look at something coldly.)<sup>16</sup>

This brings out well a crucial difference between the experience of art and of nature. Nature permits or invites the projection of experience, whereas the work of art is the intentional object of experience. Another way to bring out this difference is to note that when in eighteenth-century aesthetics the continuity in experience of the work of art and of nature was axiomatic, one of the most popular ideas, thanks no doubt ultimately to Locke, was to understand that experience in terms of the association of ideas. A shade of red looks warm because we associate it with the warmth of the fire, and so on. In modern aesthetics on the other hand, a sharp distinction is drawn between understanding and responding to the work of art and the significance a work has for us personally.

The question we are considering then is what grounds there are for comparing or for distinguishing the experiences of works of art and nature. The ground for comparison traditionally has been the beauty of both. With the apparent retreat of beauty from the philosophy of art, it seems that this ground for comparison has been lost. (I say “apparent,” since the necessity for disconnecting art and beauty has been contested, for example, by Mary Mothersill, but the very title of her book, *Beauty Restored*, concedes that much contemporary aesthetics is written without so much as a mention of beauty.) My contention is that this state of affairs has not come about by chance but owes something at least to the influence of Hegel, who goes further than simply distinguishing art and nature by seeking to establish the superiority of art over nature. In our own time this has led to the view that in understanding the aesthetic we should regard art as primary, nature as secondary. The terms are no longer frankly evaluative as they are in the case of Hegel’s superior/inferior ranking of art and nature. The position is rather that the notion of the aesthetic is conceptually dependent on art; without art, there would be no conception—certainly no *adequate* conception—of the aesthetic. Our contemporary notion of art and of the aesthetic developed together, are of a piece. I call this the “art-first” position.

One of the most influential sources of the “art-first” position in contemporary aesthetics is Richard Wollheim’s *Art and Its Objects*. Upon his first mentioning the aesthetic attitude, Wollheim appends, quite casually as it might seem, a “that is” clause: he says “the aesthetic attitude, i.e., regarding something as a work of art.”<sup>17</sup> Wollheim later observes that

a serious distortion is introduced into many accounts of the aesthetic attitude by taking as central to it cases which are really peripheral or secondary; that is, cases where what we regard as a work of art is, in point of fact, a piece of uncontrived nature. Kant, for instance, asks us to consider a rose that we contemplate as beautiful.<sup>18</sup>

The “art-first” position has been challenged, notably by Frank Sibley. It is not my purpose to explore the pros and cons of the “art-first” position here (I have done that elsewhere), but the issue needs to be mentioned, since clearly our conception of what it is to experience a work of art on the one hand and a beautiful piece of nature on the other is likely to be affected by where we stand on this issue. Is the aesthetic experience of nature derivative from art? I am doubtful that it is, but do not argue for, rather than simply state, that view here.

In summary form, my doubts about the “art-first” thesis spring from being impressed by the sheer differences (rather than by any continuities) between art and nature, differences that I have been emphasizing in this chapter. Art speaks—it gives us the possibility of truth—but nature is dumb. This is an esoteric way of saying that revelatory theories of art are possible, that it is at least plausible to think that a work of art discloses some sort of truth, but we have ceased to think of nature as a book that can be read. So far as art is concerned, we should think of it in terms of truth or the disclosure of being. Several radically distinct philosophical accounts of the truthful in art, ranging from those of Collingwood to those of Heidegger and Langer, have been worked out. But whichever such theory we might espouse, we should notice that none of them is applicable to nature.

Rather than say with Hegel that art is a product of human freedom, we can at least follow him in the cognitive emphasis he places on art (as opposed to Kant’s anticognitivist aesthetics) and note the possibility of theories of art that compare art with language. On the other hand, notions about the language of nature, though once dominant, now seem outmoded. Hegel goes too far in rejecting the mimetic, though it should not be retained in aesthetics in the traditional forms as understood by Plato and Aristotle. Rather, representational art shows us what things are like, catches their character and qualia, along lines suggested by Schopenhauer, whereas nature does not. Rather than show us what things are like, nature, as it were, is things and processes, whose aesthetic surface, when we are captivated by the beauty of nature, is the subject of our interest.

I suggested earlier that one striking difference between art and nature is that with art we have a critical engagement, that there is the critical evaluation



of a work of art but not of nature. More recently, we have been concerned with the ranking of art and nature in respect of the question, which has priority in aesthetic experience. Francis Sparshott addresses both these issues in his fine article "Aesthetic Viewpoints."<sup>19</sup> He considers the line of argument that ties aesthetics to the "idealized procedures of critical discourse" (Sparshott, p. 18). This line holds that

critical discourse is directed at works of art and not at natural objects because all modes of criticism, technical and practical as well as aesthetic, are directed, not incidentally but essentially, at how things are done and made. Flowers and faces, seashells and sunsets, and all other natural objects actually or conventionally regarded as likely to be found beautiful, can be enjoyed, relished, delighted in, even appreciated, but not meaningfully criticized, because there is nothing on which the criticism could find a purchase. Criticism belongs among the ways of talking that we apply to things only insofar as we can put them in the context of the self-correcting body of human practice in which we ourselves share, as opposed to the environmental world that we can only put up with, or intervene in as aliens, or be grateful for. Criticism is reserved for things that people like us did or made, but didn't have to, might have done better or worse or differently. (Sparshott, p. 18)

Against this, Sparshott points out, the beauties of art and nature have much in common. But, as he later reports Wollheim as suggesting: "The difference between the beauties of art and those of nature lies in the fact that the former have (or are expected to have) style, and the latter never do" (Sparshott, p. 23). After undertaking a sensitive examination of Wollheim's account of art, Sparshott concludes that

we do need some general concept corresponding to "the beautiful," applicable in the same sort of way to natural objects, to works of art, and to non-artistic artifacts, all of which may immediately attract and reward attention in the same way. Wollheim's imaginary *Ur*-painters notice a kind of interestingness and attractiveness that they then impart to things they have made. . . . But from there we presumably do branch out: an interestingness that is progressively thematized within a producing and appreciating community will surely become more and more radically different from what simply catches the eye. And it is pre-eminently these fully developed works of art that are objects of criticism. If that is so, then either the object of criticism as such cannot be identical with the aesthetic object as such, or the aesthetic object as such cannot be identical with the thing of beauty as such. (Sparshott, p. 27)

Sparshott's answer to my question—which is aesthetically prior, art or nature?—then, is in effect to show that the question is too crude. From one point of view, nature is aesthetically prior to art. This is the viewpoint of beauty. Both works of art and works of nature are beautiful but the artist (confining ourselves here to visual art) begins by being interested in some visible aspect of an object and making a mark that catches the eye in the same way

(Wollheim's *Ur-painters*) (Sparshott, p. 22). But, given that the practice of art is made possible by the antecedent existence of the beautiful in nature, then the arts outgrow that which merely catches the eye, so if we call the interests to which in their developed form they appeal an "aesthetic interest," that interest pertains to art and not to nature. So if I want to speak like that I can say that art in its developed forms is aesthetically prior to nature, though this would be a misleading way to speak. It would be better to say that art offers aesthetic experience not available in nature.

The point is that Sparshott's position does justice to the intuition that, in a sense, nature must be aesthetically prior to art, but it also does justice to the intuition that art does not simply reduplicate the aesthetic delights of nature but offers aesthetic rewards of its own. It is easy here but not necessary and indeed, in light of Sparshott's diagnosis, should I think be avoided, to slip into the Hegelian language of treating art as superior to nature.

My intention in this chapter has been to register the idea that since the nineteenth century both art and the theory of art have pulled away from an affinity with nature, an affinity that was long-established in European culture (though "nature" is a treacherous term and was itself variously theorized across the centuries). I follow Hegel, in seeing him to have played a crucial part in this fracture, but unlike him, think we need to recognize and provide for an account of natural beauty in its own right—that is, not as overshadowed by art. My line has been roughly to follow Hegel on art but Kant on nature. Post-Hegelian aesthetics of art is unsuitable for application to nature on account of its symbolic and cognitive turn. Nature, in its cognitive aspect, is the province not of aesthetics but of the natural sciences, of which nothing has been said here, but the fact of the growth of which is essential to understanding the asymmetry I claim there to be between the experience of art and the beauty of nature.

## NOTES



1. George Dickie, "Evaluating Art," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 25, no. 1 (winter 1985): 14.

2. Arnold Berleant, "The Aesthetics of Art and Nature," in *Landscape, Natural Beauty, and the Arts*, ed. S. Kemal and I. Gaskell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 228. Among other things, Berleant here is commenting on my essay, "Natural Beauty without Metaphysics," published in the same collection.

3. Andrew Forge, "Art/Nature," in *Philosophy and the Arts: Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures*, vol. 6: 1971–72, ed. G. Vesey (London: Macmillan, 1973), p. 230.

4. Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1976), p. 33.

5. B. C. Nath, review of *Landscape, Natural Beauty, and the Arts*, op. cit., in *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* 19, nos. 1–2 (1996): 59–60, commenting on my essay in that collection, "Natural Beauty without Metaphysics."

6. R. G. Collingwood, *Outlines of a Philosophy of Art* (1925; reprint: Bristol, UK: Thoemmes Press, 1994), pp. 53–54.
7. Andrew Brennan, *Thinking about Nature: An Investigation of Nature, Value and Ecology* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 88.
8. Robert Elliot, "Faking Nature," *Inquiry* 25 (1982): 81–93.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
10. John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 32.
11. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. W. Glen-Doepel (London: Sheed & Ward, 1979), p. 436.
12. Herman Parret, "Kant on Music and the Hierarchy of the Arts," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56, no. 3 (summer 1998): 259–60.
13. G. W. F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, trans. B. Bosanquet (London: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 3. Subsequent references are to this edition and given in parentheses in the text.
14. Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 42.
15. Stephen Bungay, *Beauty and Truth: A Study of Hegel's Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 15.
16. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. von Wright in collaboration with H. Nyman, trans. P. Winch (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p. 4.
17. Richard Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*, 2nd ed., with *Six Supplementary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 93.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
19. Francis Sparshott, "Aesthetic Viewpoints," *Dialectics and Humanism: The Polish Philosophical Quarterly* 15, nos. 1–2 (1988): 15–30 (special issue on "Art and Philosophy: Mutual Connections and Inspirations"). Subsequent page references to this article are given in parentheses in the text.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# Experience as Art



JOSEPH KUPFER

## I



For anyone addressing the relationship of art to everyday life, the perspective championed by John Dewey naturally recommends itself. Dewey vigorously and repeatedly argues for the continuity between all specialized endeavors and the experience of the everyday. In examining science, religion, philosophy, or art for example, we situate the particular enterprise most fruitfully by seeing how its mode of inquiry and practice arise out of conflicts endemic to ordinary existence. By situating the origins of the specialized inquiry in ordinary experience, we can keep from losing ourselves in abstraction and esoteric puzzles.

Dewey argues with regard to philosophy, for instance, that Greek metaphysics erred in deriving its conception of essential reality from the fixed, static character of grammar.<sup>1</sup> Thus we find Aristotle's preference for the contemplative life over the practical, as well as for the fine arts over the useful crafts. Dewey criticizes the contemplative conception of philosophy, itself embodied in theories that begin with mind operating "apart from any overt interaction of the organism with surrounding conditions."<sup>2</sup> So too can understanding science and art lose its moorings in everyday, practical pursuits in favor of a more detached, static conception. Commonplace human needs and problems lie at the base of the most exotic heights of scientific theory-building and artistic flights of imaginative expression. And it is to deal with everyday human needs and problems that the edifices of science and excursions of art must return.

Beginning with the everyday in exploring the nature of art is especially advisable on strategic grounds. To assume that art and ordinary life are separate

and inherently disparate inevitably makes it difficult to show the relevance of art to common life. As Dewey points out, such separation has promoted the sealing off of art in museums and concert halls, as if it were out of bounds to the layperson. But viewed as continuous with ordinary life, art necessarily speaks to that life and the alterations in it. What matters most is how we live our lives. As with science, philosophy, religion, and all other specialized practices, art exists for the sake of everyday life, not the other way around.

Finally, there is empirical reason to think that art is continuous with everyday life, because ordinary life is replete with aesthetic qualities. Whether we are repairing an automobile, fishing in a stream, or carrying on an engrossing conversation, our everyday activities can themselves be aesthetically rewarding.<sup>3</sup> Works of art differ from the everyday only in that our interactions with them consistently yield more of the defining features of aesthetic experience, and yield them in greater degree.<sup>4</sup>

## II



The features that define aesthetically valuable experience indicate what it is in ordinary life that art responds to and thereby establishes the continuity between the ordinary and the artistic. To understand art, Dewey advises, we must first get clear on the nature of aesthetic experience as we find it in the commonplace. Art then will be derivatively defined as the most reliable source of the most concentrated features of aesthetic experience. These features include a balance between doing and undergoing; funding; temporal unity; mutual modification of parts; pervasive (emotional) quality; and consummation.

First, then, to the balance between doing and undergoing, understood by Dewey to be that interaction that harmonizes our activity and receptivity. When doing and undergoing are in balance, what we do is conditioned by what we are taking in, and what we receive is shaped by our active involvement. The balance between activity and receptivity is reached in aesthetic conversation, for example, when we listen attentively and speak receptively. In attentive listening, we focus on what is being said, working to connect the ideas with each other and with the speaker's purpose. When we speak receptively, what we say and how we say it is shaped by our perception of how our words affect our interlocutor.

As in so much of his thought, Dewey here exhibits his Aristotelian penchant for locating the good as the mean between undesirable extremes. When unbalanced on the side of doing (activity), we act with too little attention to the effects we are bringing about. Thus do teachers simply lecture from their notes without regard for student reaction. Conversely, when we are undergoing at the expense of doing, we are too passive. Thus do students sit back, letting the lecture wash over them with little effort at seeing how the different

ideas hang together. As with most extremes, the extremes of doing and under-going occur more frequently than the desirable mean, because they are more easily achieved.

In ordinary pursuits of every stripe, we find most delight when our active and receptive capacities are harmonized: the fisherman whose manipulation of the fly rod is a response to the perceived movement of water and weeds; the mechanic whose adjustment and readjustment of the engine is the result of interpreting its sounds; or the parent who tempers the demands he makes on his child because he notices alterations in his child's behavior. Success in competitive interactions such as boxing, chess, and debate also requires that we attain the balance between doing and undergoing found in adapting, once and again, to the behavior of our opponents.

Within the active aspect of aesthetic experience, Dewey emphasizes "funding": bringing interests and attitudes, meanings and values, from previous experience to present perception.<sup>5</sup> Aesthetic experience derives much of its richness from strata of funding and the multiplicity of their sources. Virtually anything can be funded in daily aesthetic experience or in interaction with works of art, provided that what is funded blends with what is currently perceived. We draw on our store of personal experience, scientific understanding, and historical and cultural knowledge, sometimes as a matter of course, sometimes quite self-consciously.

Indeed, one of the ways art enriches the everyday aesthetic experience is by providing us with a reservoir of images and perspectives with which to supplement the direct material of perception. For example, appreciation of Monet's studies of haystacks or the cathedral at Rouen can enliven us to modulations in natural light due to time of day or season. But the reverse is also necessary. We must bring our personal and cultural store of experience to bear on works of art to vivify them and flesh them out. Our own pangs of jealousy or spite further our appreciation of *Othello*, and knowing Homer's *Odyssey* will doubtless deepen our enjoyment of James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

The balance between doing and undergoing is further needed for the temporal unity that characterizes aesthetic experiences. Not only do we bring prior meanings and values to what is presently taking place, but active involvement includes keeping in mind that which has already transpired during this particular aesthetic experience. How else could we appreciate the rhyme scheme of a poem or variations on a musical theme? Receptivity to various possibilities within the present, moreover, must be accompanied by anticipation of what is yet to come: further complications, dissonances, tensions, and their potential resolutions. Actively engaging what is present in our perception, the occurring moment in aesthetic experience is infused with both past and future. As Dewey remarks, "Art celebrates with peculiar intensity the moments in which the past reinforces the present and in which the future is a quickening of what now is."<sup>6</sup>

Besides unity of time, aesthetic experience is characterized by the unity of compositional integration, the constituents of the experience mutually modi-

fying one another. The thrust and meaning of each part or feature of the experience is enhanced by its relation to other parts and features. Elements of the experience have the qualities they do because of their relation to one another, and because of how they are positioned in this particular whole. In well-crafted fiction, for instance, the plot of the story provides for the development of the characters and the literary themes, even as the characters move the plot and embody the thematic meaning. Similarly with color in painting: color can define line, space, and volume, and in turn be given meaning by these elements of painting. And of course, different colors can strengthen or diminish one another while necessarily determining the effectiveness of the overall color scheme.

Aesthetic experience is marked by the integration of elements, yet the constituents do not blur together. They retain their distinctive identities. Themes in a musical composition, scenes in a play, and portions of a painting possess an individuality that nonetheless has the character it does because of the relationship of this part to other parts within the whole.<sup>7</sup>

The mutual modification among the constituents of aesthetic experience is not simply given, but requires our active involvement. Our integrative contribution is facilitated by emotion or affect that carries the experience forward, instigating affinities among the elements: "[Emotion] selects what is congruous and dyes what is selected with its color, thereby giving qualitative unity to material externally disparate and dissimilar."<sup>8</sup> For Dewey, emotion is not a separable element, but pervades the entire experience. Of course, the pervasive felt quality can be complex, composed of subordinate emotional streams. For example, a play in which despair over failure and disappointment is the dominant chord might incorporate compassion, pride, and anger—as playwright Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* perhaps does.<sup>9</sup>

Within aesthetic experience, tensions and oppositions are synthesized. Tensions, resistances, and obstacles to movement are converted into material for fresh episodes, with the result that the whole unfolds as if growing in a purposeful direction. Material in one section seems to open onto that of the next: "Every successive part flows freely, without seam . . . and dead centers. . . . There are pauses . . . , but they punctuate and define the quality of movement."<sup>10</sup> What is begun is carried forward until reaching a culmination.

Speaking of practical activity, Dewey observes that skill enables people to utilize previous thought "for some other stage, until . . . the end . . . [which] summarizes and finishes off the process."<sup>11</sup> The parts and phases of aesthetic experience are brought to completion in what Dewey calls a consummation.<sup>12</sup> Aesthetic experience is consummatory. As the experience gathers towards a final rounding out, moreover, small-scale local consummations take place. To take familiar artistic examples, each movement of a symphony or act in a play has its own localized fulfillment in addition to its contribution to the consummatory quality of the entire aesthetic experience.

Experience that ends in fulfillment contrasts, once again, with two unsatisfactory extremes. At one extreme, experience continues past true closure,

with the result that vitality is dissipated. The experience peters out. At the other extreme is interruption or premature cessation, in which the significance of the elements of the experience is not fully developed. Many supposedly complete works of art are blemished by meaning that is left dangling: connotations of words in a poem are not probed; themes in a musical composition go unexplored; characters in a work of fiction lack motivation or narrative force.

### III



Having articulated the central features of aesthetic experience, we can proceed to consider how art provides the opportunity for refined and concentrated forms of this experience. Let me begin by distinguishing three objects: the work of art; the performance of the work of art; and the aesthetic object. These objects are, respectively: *physical*, *phenomenal*, and *phenomenological*. The work of art is a text, the product of the artist's work. It is typically a physical object, such as a painting, musical score, or literary text. The work of art exists independent of any particular performance of it.

The performance of the work of art yields a phenomenal object, the work of art as presented to sense perception and cognition. A particular concert or recording performs a musical score, just as a theatrical cast gives a particular performance of a dramatic play. Our interaction with the performed work of art issues in an experience that is more or less aesthetic. The center of attention of this experience is the aesthetic object. Created within experience, the aesthetic object is distinct from but dependent upon the work of art and some performance of it.

We will begin by sketching a conception of the work of art and its performance and then consider the nature of the aesthetic object. The ontological status of the work of art is itself a matter of considerable debate and it is not possible to rehearse here the various theories and their typology. I will simply offer my own account, sticking close to fairly clear-cut cases to explain the view, and later dealing with more problematic kinds of art. On my account, the work of art is typically the physical object or text that the artist leaves us. It is his or her creation, the result of working material and transforming it into a publicly available object. The physical object consists of words, notes, or notations on a page, paint on canvas, brick, bronze, or clay.

This account seems most obvious for the plastic arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, and the like. It requires more elaboration when applied to the temporal arts of music and dance, with literary works falling between these two artistic poles. As their classification implies, the plastic arts are given to us by the artist as physical objects: paintings, sculptures, architecture, earthenworks. The physical completeness of the plastic work can mislead us into thinking that the physical object is identical to the aesthetic object, that it is



the subject of appreciation. Nevertheless, even the plastic arts must be performed. It is just that their performance tends to be more subtle and less noticeable than the performance of such temporal arts as music and dance. But we perform paintings, sculptures, and buildings by deciding where to place them as well as how to perceive them. How high and in what light is this painting hung? On what site is this sculpture or building placed?

We are by now familiar with the difficult and weighty decisions concerning how a proposed building is to relate to objects that occupy space adjacent to and proximate to its proposed site. How we perceive this particular building will be affected by the features possessed by its neighboring edifices, other built objects, and natural forms. How well or poorly the particular building functions in human experience as an aesthetic object is often shaped by this sort of performative decision.

Then, too, there are the performative aspects of laypersons who experience building, sculpture, and painting in their everyday lives. We must decide whether to view the building or sculpture in daylight or at night. When walking through the building, we can choose the pattern of circulation and the order in which the building's elements are experienced. Similarly, we decide how to walk around the sculpture and at what distance to view it or a painting. It makes a world of difference whether we minutely scrutinize a painting or view it from ten meters away.

The very physical completeness of the plastic arts may, ironically, require greater performative effort on the part of audiences than for some of the other arts. The performative effort in response to physical objects is itself primarily physical: hanging paintings, perusing sculptures, moving through buildings. Just as the plastic arts must be performed, for all their apparent completeness as independently subsisting objects, so too are they temporal in experience. The phenomenological, aesthetic object accrues and unfolds over time. Consequently, the appearance of *stasis* that is given by paintings in contrast to music should not mislead us when we articulate the aesthetic object that paintings and their like provide.

Consider next the temporal arts of music and dance. Although all art is experienced over time, these arts are additionally temporal in that when performed, they disappear into the past moment by moment in a way that sculpture and painting do not. Their textual notations, moreover, are essentially directions for performance that include such temporal designations as rhythm and tempo. The score or dance notation is the physical object created by the artist. Its directions for performance may be schematic, leaving a great deal of room for interpretation by performers, or they may be very detailed and hence tightly constrain performance.

The performance of the work of art, as in the playing of a string quartet or dancing of a ballet, presents yet another physical object. The physical performance has more perceptual properties and more interesting properties than those possessed by the work of art simpliciter—the score or notation. Played

notes have timbre, pitch, volume, and duration, while notes on a score do not. Because these properties exist or have artistic significance only in perception, and these are more salient than the strictly physical properties of the played score or danced notation, we may consider the performance the phenomenal object. This object is the performed text, the work of art as brought to sensory and cognitive life for aesthetic appreciation.

Of course, people with rich imaginations may be able to render a private performance from the musical score or dance notation in their mind's ear or eye. Nothing I have said precludes such direct, imaginative performance. Yet it seems usually the case that such direct performance from text to personal experience is but a minimal version of the full-blooded performance with instruments and human bodies. Moreover, the direct performance is private, not publicly accessible as the latter is. One benefit of the notion of the private, direct performance of text, however, is that it leads us to consideration of the literary work. Recall that the work of art consists in words on a page or computer screen; it is the written record the artist has left us of his or her story, novel, poem, or play. When we read the literary text we perform it, whether aloud or silently, whether publicly as a "reading" or for ourselves. The conventions of language meaning and use, as well as the conventions of the art form or genre, govern our reading.

These background conditions frame our aesthetic response, our performance of the text, in which we must conjure up characters and plot, infer motivation, and ruminate on the thematic meaning of the meaning of the text. The phenomenal object is imaginative. It is the world of the work, the fictive world that the literary work occasions or gives instructions for producing. Our imaginative literary construct, then, parallels the phenomenal object of music and dance that is created on the basis of a score and dance notation. It also parallels our physical performance of the plastic arts noted above. Where the plastic arts evoke the physical performance of hanging a painting or perambulating around a sculpture, the performance of literary texts is cognitive and imaginative. We must conspire with the writer or speaker to summon up an imaginary world made up of characters, speech, behavior, and incidents.

What of stories, plays, and poems that have no written text, but are passed on in an oral tradition? Or the legions of songs and dances with lively histories and performances long before musical scores and dance notations evolved? Here we have situations in which there are no discrete physical works of art that correspond to the performances; however, there are thoughts and memories that persist within individuals and from one generation to the next. What are we to say of these nonphysical artifacts?

We can analogize these mental objects to the physical works of art, especially since these are what the artists in question did in fact bequeath to their public. The texts then would be mental objects that could potentially be recorded even as they are indeed potential performances. As with subsequently written texts, the mental texts provide the basis for phenomenal perform-

ances—of music and dance, story, poem, and drama. Like their physical counterparts, these mental texts exist even when not performed, are subject to modification and interpretation, and are passed on as valued cultural possessions.

Alternatively, we could analogize these mental objects to their phenomenal performances and thereby consider them as private ghostly performances. But this seems less promising, since they exist even when not actively brought to mind, when not privately performed. I know a host of melodies, songs, poems, and stories even when not thinking of them. And this seems more like physical literary texts on my shelf, awaiting the summons for actual performance.

In the case of film, the phenomenal performed object consists in the series of perceptual images on the theater or video screen, produced by technologically “showing”/performing the physical film or digital recording. Films are narrative in structure, like novels, plays, and some poetry, but their phenomenal objects are perceived, as with music and dance, rather than imagined.

To summarize the account so far. The work of art is the physical (or mental) object that the artist gives to the world. It ranges from the score in music, to the written literary text, to the paint on canvas. The physical object is performed by a second tier of artists such as musicians and museum curators, or by members of an audience such as perceivers of paintings and readers of novels. When the work of art is performed, the audience is able to perceive a phenomenal object, one that possesses sensible properties some or all of which the work of art itself does not possess. The phenomenal object enters into an aesthetic experience through the audience’s receptive and active participation. The aesthetic object thereby created is a phenomenological object.

#### IV



Through our interpretive appropriation of the performed work of art, an aesthetic object is created. For example, when the phenomenal object, such as a series of played musical notes, is grasped as a variation on the musical theme introduced four bars earlier, an aesthetic object has emerged. When the phenomenal object, such as a series of linguistic meanings, is understood in the context of the other meanings of the poem to express irony, an aesthetic object has emerged. When the phenomenal object, such as a series of red shapes on a canvas, is perceived as a rising and falling wave within the overall composition of the painting, an aesthetic object has emerged. The phenomenal object is transformed or has become the material for a phenomenological object: an object of attention and invention that is invested with meaning. The meaning is neither exclusively subjective nor objective, but both.

Objectively, meaning is given by what the artist has done with the notes, words, paint. But as we saw, meaning also depends on cultural conventions of varying levels of generality and specificity: everything from conventional symbols, such as those found in roses and sunrises, to habitual responses to the

resolution of tonic tension in music. Words in literature, gestures in dance, tempos in music, doors and windows in buildings—all are freighted with cultural meaning and value.

Just as particular works of art can be performed differently on different occasions, even by the same performers, so too can our aesthetic experience of a performed work vary. As constituted in aesthetic experience, the aesthetic object is subject to a host of influences. First, of course, a different performance of a musical score, literary text, or painting is going to alter the phenomenal object. In addition, accretions and deletions in our individual pool of fundable material will alter our interaction with the performed work. Greater awareness of cultural allusions, such as a work's reference to scientific theory, Biblical allegory, or previous art can significantly change the aesthetic object we experience. Conversely, we might cease to bring certain references to a performed work because of change in our personal experience or artistic interpretation. This is why exposure to art criticism can influence our subsequent aesthetic experience.

For example, a feminist interpretation of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* could influence us to see the play in such a way that we no longer bring to bear cultural and personal meanings with which we funded prior aesthetic experiences of it. We no longer interpret the play, for instance, as a light-hearted battle of the sexes. Alternatively, because of biographical information we acquire about Arthur Miller, we might abandon funding *The Crucible* as an allegory about anti-communist "witch-hunting" in mid-twentieth-century U.S. politics.

Personal artistic experiences can also shape how we interact with performances of works of art. Having learned to play the piano, for example, we may notice and appreciate fingering, change of tempo, or polyrhythms that we had previously overlooked. As a result, the aesthetic object of our experience is richer than it used to be. Similarly, moving through Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum may enable us subsequently to appreciate shifts in perception and prospect afforded by buildings designed by other architects.

## V



What is distinctive about our interaction with performances of artworks is the freedom that we enjoy when so engaged. Aesthetic freedom, moreover, is not simply permitted; it is demanded. Our active participation is needed to create the aesthetic object, otherwise we are merely perceiving the work of art or its performance—the phenomenal object. Because the parts of the aesthetic object do not stand in any single determinate relationship, we are called upon to freely arrange the parts or aspects of the phenomenal object and articulate a phenomenological object that is complete in itself. There is no concept or rule to apply in our response to the artwork because we are not bound to con-

struct a definite thing. Definite things are organized according to concepts, however open-ended some of these concepts may be.

Consider the difference between arranging colored shapes into a conceptually defined thing such as a ball or house and arranging them simply into an interesting, pleasing design. In the latter case, we are not constructing something for some purpose external to our creation; therefore, we are freed from the restrictions of utility to explore possibilities.<sup>13</sup> We are not limited by the specifics of a definite concept and are instead required to exercise our creative powers freely, in a manner paralleling the artist's creative activities.<sup>14</sup>

The making of useful objects, on the other hand, is governed by the need to fulfill a purpose. The practical end enters into the concept by which the object is defined and for which it exists. Depending on whether it succeeds or fails to fit the function at hand, a mechanical product is correct or incorrect, and there are techniques specifying ways to attain a correct result. But more than technique is needed to bring about an aesthetic object.

In addition, there are no correct or incorrect renditions of aesthetic objects, because extrinsic criteria of correctness, such as functional suitability, are not applicable. Instead, our response to art is governed simply by the aesthetic goal of creating a phenomenological object richest in aesthetic features (as examined in section II above). Consequently, aesthetic objects are more or less appropriate to the relevant works of art or their performance. Aesthetic objects are more or less creative, original, insightful, or fecund in aesthetic qualities. Hence the plurality and virtuosity of interpretations whereby we who respond are credited with our own contribution to the aesthetic object that emerges.

Imagination is perhaps the most salient dimension of the freedom inherent in aesthetic response. Although constrained by the form and content of the work of art or its performance, the imagination at play in aesthetic response has plenty of room to experiment and invent. We are free to fund the artwork with meanings we select from personal experience and culture. We are free to draw out latent possibilities and enlarge upon the presented material. Our imaginations are turned loose to make different connections among the parts and aspects of the material presented by artist and performer.

This free play of imagination is sometimes conspicuous by its absence. Poorer works of art tell us what to think or feel rather than evoking our active, imaginative response. A work of art can rely on formulas, as in plots or characters in novels, chord structures in music, and color combinations in painting. Such formulaic art calls for a minimal amount of superficial funding. What we bring to the work from our own lives and cultural knowledge remains as it was before the artistic encounter. In contrast, good art presses us to think, feel, and perceive in novel ways. New possibilities emerge when our fund of meaning engages the work of art in unforeseen directions. The result is that we feel enlivened by the enlarging of our sensibility and imaginative powers.

## VI



Laypersons are actively responsible for aesthetic experience in their lives in three distinct ways: first, when in the course of everyday activities, such as conversation and work, the various aesthetic features of experience happily converge with sufficient intensity. We mark off and remember that particular picnic, business meeting, or family gathering because it is so rich in aesthetic features. Secondly, nonartists are called upon to perform all manner of artworks. By walking around and through buildings, we perform works of architecture. Through choice of location and lighting we perform paintings, photographs, and sculpture in our home or workplace. And when we read, we perform literary works for ourselves and others. Last, everyday life also presents opportunities for the nonartist to make works of art. Folk art is endemic to human culture everywhere. Ordinary people make up stories and poems, improvise their own dances and songs, and express their artistic talent in craftsmanship and the decoration of personal places. Whether throwing pots, weaving rugs, or building their homes, people we would not usually classify as artists create artworks. Furthermore, technological innovation always opens up artistic possibilities for laypersons as well as artists. And electronic technologies have recently spectacularly expanded the opportunities ordinary people have for performing and creating their own works of art.

With the advent of the tape recorder, for example, ordinary people were able to edit and compile their own musical anthologies. They could juxtapose works from genres as diverse as opera and rock, country and jazz, in addition to organizing music within standard genres. Similar reorderings of visual material in collage and assemblage became possible through photocopying technologies. And, of course, the camera itself gave everyone the chance to be a visual artist of some proficiency. Nowadays, the videocamera empowers laypersons to be movie-makers with much less of the expertise hitherto required for celluloid film-making.

Recent sophisticated recording technologies allow nonmusicians not only to mix and dub prerecorded music, but to mix and dub music they themselves produce. People can create music without playing traditional instruments, by achieving minimal mastery of the synthetic production of sound. Similarly with computer-generated visual designs. Individuals need not be expert draughtsmen or brush-wielders in order to create pictures, greeting cards, and recital programs. Not only does electronic technology provide for creativity that mirrors the crafts of pre-electronic and pre-industrial societies such as rug weaving and pot-throwing, but it enables laypersons to enter into the production of the so-called fine arts of visual and musical works. The line separating artist from layperson, expert from amateur, becomes further blurred—in ways that Dewey would no doubt applaud.

## VII



A Deweyan account of aesthetic experience facilitates the understanding of how change in technology, work, and social relations inevitably translate into change in art and everyday aesthetic experience. Because art grows out of everyday life, alteration in that life necessarily effects change in art. And because everyday life is itself replete with aesthetic possibilities, as that life is technologically and socially transformed, so are the conditions for daily aesthetic experience. The obvious emphasis on and accommodation to change in a Deweyan aesthetic, however, may obscure its complementary provision for permanence.

Although the materials, techniques, and modes of aesthetic experience reflect the inevitable changes in human interest and environment, the structure of the experience is stable. The definitive pattern of aesthetic experience continues to be valued because it distills the qualities of everyday life that attend successful adaptation to change. After all, argues Dewey, we live in a world constantly threatened with disorder. It is only natural therefore that "every living creature . . . welcomes order with a response of harmonious feeling . . . [because] only when an organism shares in the ordered relations of its environment does it secure the stability essential to living."<sup>15</sup> Fittingly enough, even the Deweyan explanation of permanence is dialectically wedded to change: Permanence is found in the pattern of response that consistently adapts to change.

When we reestablish union with the environment in the face of new conflicts and unanticipated opposition, our experience is aesthetic. Such integral experiences, moreover, are valued intrinsically.<sup>16</sup> Transforming obstacles to our ends into material for our satisfaction produces an integration of doing and undergoing; a union of past and future with the present; mutually modified parts or moments; and an emotionally paced resolution of tensions in a consummatory conclusion. Adapting to new circumstances, for example, requires a balance between what we do and what we undergo. Our perception of a situation's details must be informed by imagined possibilities for action, but actions have to be monitored for, and then adapted to, their perceived effects.

Consider too how the mutual modification of parts operates at the level of self-definition. Harmonization of diverse habits and interests enables individuals to respond with flexibility to new situations. Coordinating habits and interests that tug in competing directions frees us from the rigidity that routinized habits dictate.<sup>17</sup> What Dewey says of the factors in actions is true also for the habits that govern them: "In learning an action, . . . one of necessity learns . . . to make varied combinations of [its factors], according to change of circumstances."<sup>18</sup> A person whose varied habits mutually enhance one another possesses the plasticity needed to adjust to change in environment. And so with the other defining features of aesthetic experience, each is con-

ductive to successful adaptation (as with resolution of tensions) or is a concomitant of it (as with pervasive emotional quality).

The structure of aesthetic experience is not an immutable essence or a Kantian presupposition of intelligibility. But it captures and concentrates the pattern of response human beings repeatedly find effective in their interactions with the world and one another. The contours of experience distilled in aesthetic experience reflect the values that undergird diverse spheres of everyday life—from work and family, to sports, politics, and community. Because aesthetic experience celebrates the patterns of interaction that promote human welfare in the everyday, we value aesthetic experience intrinsically, for its own sake.

The relationship between the structure of aesthetic experience and successful living explains why Dewey believes that aesthetic experience is central to all human valuation. “To aesthetic experience, then, the philosopher must go to understand what experience is.”<sup>19</sup> Aesthetic experience crystallizes what makes any experience valuable in itself and not merely instrumentally good. Consequently, all values have their source in aesthetic experience, whether directly—as in the elegance of scientific theories, or indirectly—as in the organization of a business that facilitates communication among its different divisions. Although Dewey’s aesthetic theory is rightly esteemed for its insistence on openness to change in ordinary life and the art world, we do well to appreciate the pattern that persists throughout the novelty.

## NOTES



1. John Dewey, “Nature, Communication, and Meaning,” chap. 5, in *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover, 1958).

2. John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty* (New York: Minton, Balch, 1929), pp. 193–94.

3. Thus does Dewey claim that “we must arrive at the theory of art by means of a detour” through everyday life (see *Art as Experience* [New York: Minton, Balch, 1934], p. 33). Only because daily living has the potential to be aesthetic is it possible for artworks to emerge from it and return to enrich it.

4. Strictly speaking, Dewey refers to experience replete with aesthetic qualities as “an experience”; however, I shall adopt the now-common practice of speaking of it as an “aesthetic experience.”

5. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, op. cit., pp. 71, 87–89, 310.

6. Ibid., p. 18. Once again, we have a mean between extremes dwelling on the past or being absorbed in possible future occurrences at the expense of present perception. The difficult and immensely rewarding task is to keep relevant episodes from the past in mind during attention to the present, while also anticipating future possibilities.

7. In everyday life, parallels can be found in the relationships between individuals as members of a sports team, family, or business organization. While individuals retain their personal identities, those identities are enhanced (or diminished) by relationships with others in the group.



8. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, op. cit., p. 42.

9. Dewey has a complex theory of expression, a theory that he thinks explains the creative process of the artist as well as the parallel recreative process of the audience or critic. Dewey subscribes to the view that expression is communication between artist and audience, and he seems inclined to define the artwork itself as an expressive object. See chapters 4 and 5 in *Art as Experience*, op. cit.

10. Ibid., p. 36.

11. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), p. 101.

12. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, op. cit., *passim*, but especially chapter 3.

13. Following Kant, art involves a sense of purposefulness without a genuine purpose. It is "as if" the painting, string quartet, or dance existed for the sake of some further end besides that of simply being an aesthetically rewarding object. Natural objects also fall under concepts, albeit of a different sort. The design of living things satisfies organic principles of growth and reproduction. And nonliving things such as stars and oceans also have definite features that make them what they are.

14. On the critic's parallel creative activity, see *Art as Experience*, op. cit., chapter 13.

15. Ibid., p. 15.

16. Ibid., p. 37.

17. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, op. cit., p. 49, and elsewhere in chapter 4.

18. Ibid., p. 45.

19. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, op. cit., p. 274.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# Pictorial Experience



RICHARD WOODFIELD

The notion of “pictorial experience” depends on the idea of the “experience of a picture,” and this latter term is fraught with difficulties that could only be properly captured by a full-length book. Rather than attempt to deal with pictures in their widest sense, in this chapter I will concentrate on ideas of pictorial experience lying behind a tradition of imagery that extends from Egyptian art to the art of our own day. In doing this I will follow Ernst Gombrich’s suggestion that we concentrate on the mechanisms at work behind the function of such images, leaving matters to do with artistic excellence to one side. In the same way that discussion of linguistic experience is prior to analysis of literature, discussion of pictorial experience is prior to discussion of the masterpieces of visual art. Paradoxically, this means that this chapter will not revolve around a discussion of the “aesthetic” so much as that which makes the aesthetic possible. It is time to reexamine the notion of the aesthetic in the light of the originating notion of *aisthesis*, but this is not the place to do it.

## THE THEORY



There is an idea, prevalent in a variety of guises, that visual imagery offers an experience of what is seen by its creator. In classic art history, the history of visual art is the history of vision. A classic formulation of this view was given by Heinrich Wölfflin in his book, *Principles of Art History*: “Vision itself has a history, and the revelation of these visual strata must be regarded as the primary task of art history.”<sup>1</sup> A little further on through his argument he declared: “Just as we can hear all kinds of words into the ringing of bells, so we can arrange the visible world in very different ways for ourselves, and

nobody can say that one way is truer than another.”<sup>2</sup> In certain philosophical circles, the visual image is taken to offer a criterion of what is seen: we come to understand what we have seen by making a drawing of it. A classic version of this view was Wittgenstein’s formulation: “What is the criterion of the visual experience?” he writes in the *Philosophical Investigations*. “Well, what would you expect the criterion to be? The representation of ‘what is seen.’”<sup>3</sup>

Art historians in the early twentieth century worked on the assumption that the artist was naturally inclined to depict what he saw, and any deviation from the naturalistic–realistic–photographic norm was a consequence of either choice or will. Philosophically, recognition of an image as an image of *X* was a matter of inculcation. For Nelson Goodman<sup>4</sup> anything could, in principle, be represented by any image, and recognizing such a connection was a matter of inculcation or habit: one recognizes Picasso’s portrait of Daniel Kahnweiler as such out of accustomization. His disciple Marx Wartofsky took the stronger view that our sense of what it was to see the world was conditioned by our habits in looking at pictures and the pictorial discoveries of our day:<sup>5</sup> people in the past saw literally different worlds.

Rather than address the theory abstractly by the construction of historically disembodied argument, this chapter will adopt a narrative approach.

## THE ART HISTORIANS: WÖLFFLIN AND RIEGL



Ironically, Wölfflin qualified the application of his own statement of the relationship between vision and depiction, opening out the possibility of an asymmetrical relationship between the two. In the same *Principles of Art History* (1915), where he had declared that the history of art was the history of vision, he acknowledged the fact that the fifteenth-century writer Leon Battista Alberti had observed the effect of reflected light on local color—“a person walking over a green meadow takes on a green color in the face”—but that it assumed no normative significance for the production of painting. This led him into the remarkable statement that “we see here how little style is determined by observations of nature alone, and that it is always decorative principles, convictions of taste, to which the last decision is assigned.”<sup>6</sup> With this qualification in mind, the notion of the artist’s vision becomes a notion of how the artist chooses to create imagery within the constraints of taste, which carries little weight for a general theory of the relationship between human vision and pictorial representation. A fifteenth-century Florentine artist did not depict the world in the way that he did just because that was the way fifteenth-century Florentines saw the world. He depicted the world in the way he did because it accorded with fifteenth-century Florentines’ judgments of taste. They simply liked the kinds of pictures that they did, and this had to do with the pictures that were available for consumption rather than abstract notions of the artist’s or public’s experience of nature.

For a more forceful notion of pictures reflecting a culture's concept of the appearance of nature, one has to turn to Alois Riegl's *Spätrömische Kunstindustrie* (1901). While Wölfflin was principally interested in art of the Italian Renaissance and used it as a norm by which to judge Baroque and Northern art, Riegl was concerned to rescue late antique art from the stigma of decline. Rejecting the notion that its artists were simply inept, he argued that the art was a product of a *Kunstwollen* to produce a self-consciously optic vision of the world. Using the traditional psychological idea that visual perception is dependent on sensations obtained from both sight and touch, Riegl analyzed the development of ancient art from an Egyptian emphasis on touch to a late antique emphasis on sight. The art of classical Greece represented just one moment in the transition from one to the other. Egyptian art was based upon

the greatest adhesion to the pure sense perception of the (seemingly objective) material individuality of objects and, therefore, the greatest possible assimilation of the material appearance of the work of art to the plane, yet not the optical plane, imagined by our eye at a distance from objects, but the tactile plane suggested by the sense of touch.<sup>7</sup>

#### In late antique art

objects are endowed with full three-dimensionality. Hence an existence of space appears to be recognized, but only as long as it adheres to material individuals; that is an impenetrable coherent space measured cubically, not infinite deep space between individual material objects. . . . It is significant that each material individual gives up its traditional tactile connection with the datum plane thus isolating itself from the plane, even though remaining on it in rank and file.<sup>8</sup>

Riegl, unlike Wölfflin, invoked the notion of *Weltanschauung* to ground the changes in visual experience and visual imagery. The worldview was literally that—a view of the world. Stylistic changes were not a product of taste or choice so much as will [*Kunstwollen*], and that will was the product of a changed *Weltanschauung*: the Egyptians could not help but see and represent the world in the way that they did. The same was true of the Greeks of classical antiquity and the Romans of the empire. Riegl drew on notions current in *Völkerpsychologie* that in the earliest period “the idea prevailed that the existence and the forms of life of . . . individual shapes were ruled by arbitrary forces.” In the classical period “men now developed (together with a gradual change in religion towards philosophy and science) concepts of binding and logical relationships among individual phenomena.” And in late classical antiquity the “mechanistic system of causality was no longer valued . . . and was replaced with a different kind of connection—magic.”<sup>9</sup> These particular ideas were by no means radical but current in his day.

It is significant for contemporary theorizing on the relationship between vision and representation that Walter Benjamin became an advocate of Riegl's views, though he gave them a characteristic shift. In his essay, “The Work of

Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproducibility,” he used the argument of Riegl’s *Late Roman Art Industry* to substantiate the notion that “during long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity’s entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well.”<sup>10</sup> Differing, of course, from Riegl’s philosophical position in his own idiosyncratic version of Marxism, Benjamin emphasized the importance of social transformation. The invention of photography brought about transformations in the perception of works of art, the notion of art itself, and the modern public’s perception of the world itself. The change in photographic processes, from long single exposures to the *carte de visite*, resulted not just in a transformation of the relationship of the photographer to the sitter, but also in the phenomenological status of the photographic image itself. While the earliest photographs captured the aura of the subject, the later, less human and more mechanized photographs alienated the subject from the viewer. In the hands of his numerous contemporary commentators such as Jonathan Crary,<sup>11</sup> the invention of photography has transformed the very way in which modern man perceives the world.

### PROBLEMS WITH RIEGL



Despite his concern to reject the norms established by the art of classical antiquity and the Italian Renaissance and because of the emergence of Impressionism, Riegl was still bound by a mimetic view of art. According to this view, artists had a natural tendency to create images of appearances of what they saw—strange appearances perhaps, but nevertheless appearances. A major transformation in this view of Egyptian art occurred with Heinrich Schäfer’s book, *Von ägyptischer Kunst* (1919). Schäfer had noticed that in a fragment of a Babylonian poem coming from the library of the Assyrian king Assurbanipal (660–627 B.C.), a description of Etana’s flight to heaven refers to the diminishing apparent size of the world below:

When he had borne [him] aloft one league,  
The eagle says to [him], to Etana:  
“See, my friend, how the land appears!  
Peer at the sea at the sides of [Ekur]!  
The land has indeed *become* a hill;  
The sea has turned into the water [*of a stream*]!”

...

When he had borne him aloft a third league,  
The Eagle [says] to him, to Etana:  
“See, my friend, how the land appe[ars]!  
The land has turned into a gardener’s ditch!”<sup>12</sup>

The poet could describe a perspectival view of the world without that view being embodied in contemporary art. There was a further reference to such diminution in Isaiah (40:22): “[Jehovah] sitteth on the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers,” and a contemporary Confucian text remarked on how small the world looks when seen from above.<sup>13</sup> Schäfer drew the radical conclusion that the distinctive Greek revolution in art took its form out of a concern with optical appearance from a stationary point of view. He was particularly critical of a vocabulary that speaks of “the Egyptian ‘turning’ things ‘over’ to draw them, ‘lifting’ them ‘up,’ ‘shifting’ them together, or ‘drawing in section,’ and so on,” as if the Egyptians were concerned with those varieties of appearance. He also emphasized that “projection” “plays no part in an Egyptian two-dimensional picture, unless the word is emptied of its content and just used for ‘sketch, represent.’”<sup>14</sup> Instead, he suggested the idea that “figures are always drawn as if their planes were looked at frontally”<sup>15</sup> and proceeded to analyze Egyptian art in terms of a complex repertoire of motifs based upon that particular drawing method. That technique may be assimilated to “writing” and in consequence the spectator’s response is appropriately described as “reading”: “And in fact we can approach the content of depictions based on frontal images best by reading off the contents of their parts as enumerative statements” (emphasis in original).<sup>16</sup> This is no more nor less than a matter of regarding Egyptian imagery as continuous with hieroglyphic script. Riegl correctly observed that Egyptian imagery lacked a spatial appeal to the observer, but as H. A. Groenewegen-Frankfort observed, following Schäfer, Riegl

did not see, however (nor did his followers in the narrow path of formal criticism), that they also lacked the intention of affecting him or of communicating a pictorial message in the manner of true narrative or true monumental art. In fact, they hardly ever depict a situation which the spectator—drawn as it were into the orbit of a “scene”—was meant to share.<sup>17</sup>

The images in Ti’s tomb, for instance, were “elaborate pictographic conceits rather than images of transient events.”<sup>18</sup>

A later critic was Ernst Gombrich, who tackled Riegl’s account of late antique art. In a review of his friend Josef Bodonyi’s dissertation on the use of the gold background in late antique art (1933), Gombrich took the opportunity to analyze changes in pictorial construction and spectator response in late antiquity.<sup>19</sup> It is well-known that Pope Gregory I had defended the use of images in a Christian context by declaring that “What Scripture is to the educated, images are to the ignorant, who see through them what they must accept; they read in them what they cannot read in books.”<sup>20</sup> But the consequences are worth pondering. If classical antique art had invoked spectatorial presence, as at a theatrical stage, late antique art worked on an entirely different principle: pictorial statement. Given the density of his original German formulation, I quote a later English version:

The new purpose which [Christian Medieval] art had to serve is too well known for me to dwell on it. The sacred story had to be conveyed with optimal clarity. No wonder we can observe an element of regression towards the symbolic or pictographic mode which is already manifest in that great landmark of Early Christian art, the mosaics of *Santa Maria Maggiore* of the fourth century. Take the scene of that cycle of the passage of the Jews through the Red Sea, where it is the Pharaoh with his army who suffers the defeat at the hands of the Lord. No doubt there are many residues here of the methods of Hellenistic illusionism, the individual treatment of bodies, movement, and draperies, but there is now no spatial framework, but rather a maplike treatment of the event to allow us to have a full view of the scene with the drowning victims of the miracle, while the towering figure of Moses dominates the representation in a manner which recalls the earlier pictographic approach.<sup>21</sup>

If earlier naturalistic images, which we only really know through the frescoes preserved in Pompeii, invited *being looked into*, the new Christian imagery of *Santa Maria Maggiore* invited *being looked at*. Late-antique narrative imagery concentrated on *what* had happened rather than *how* it had happened.

Furthermore, I would suggest, when money was available, artists and patrons concerned themselves with sumptuous display and there was a continuum between church decoration, ornament, and ritual objects. Describing the motivation behind the decoration in the new basilica of Nola, Paulinus wrote:

It seemed to us useful work gaily to embellish Felix's houses all over with sacred paintings in order to see whether the spirit of the peasants would not be surprised by this spectacle and undergo the influence of the colored sketches which are explained by inscriptions over them, so that the script may make clear what the hand has exhibited. . . . When one reads the saintly histories of chaste works, virtue induced by pious examples steals upon one.<sup>22</sup>

The decorations were both a luxury, befitting a place of worship, and educative at the same time. Whether the peasants could actually read the inscriptions or needed them to be read to them is another matter. Their experience of the environment of the buildings of the basilica was total.

### MULTIFUNCTIONALITY



As Gombrich has observed on a number of occasions, it would be a gross oversimplification to think that imagery at any given time or place would necessarily be used to satisfy just one function:

One of the things we have learnt from psychoanalysis is that what is successful in society will have many functions at the same time. The picture of the

criminal [in Italian painting] was not so much a “wanted” poster as a magic imprecation, and it may also have been a display of the skill of Leonardo or Botticelli, who actually painted criminals hanging on the wall of the town hall. Most things in society . . . fulfill many functions. The number of specialized tools is very small, and art certainly belongs to those institutions which meet many demands at the same time.<sup>23</sup>

This is, of course, just as true of medieval art. Many early Christian writers objected to the use of images on the grounds of their prohibition by the Second Commandment:

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.<sup>24</sup>

In reality, this commandment faced the same kind of obedience as all of the others: recognition of the word but subject to interpretation in the deed. There was a tradition of Jewish imagery and the early Christians in search of converts were prepared to succumb to pagans’ needs for decorative imagery; this was justified on the grounds of its potential educational function. Such imagery could also be used to satisfy the overt demands of display from socially ambitious converts. It was one thing to provide plainly functional buildings for the *hoi polloi*, but quite another to provide suitable buildings for worship by the emperor and his retinue. As André Grabar has demonstrated,<sup>25</sup> there were strong connections between the use of imperial imagery and the subsequent use of images of Christ: images of the emperor demanded respect and so did those of Christ. It is utterly unsurprising that among the ignorant, and not so ignorant, Christian images were believed to possess magical powers. They were taken to *be* what they represented. The iconoclastic movement was motivated by a variety of factors: concern for visual purity, to match the imageless devotions of the more rigorous Muslims, hostility to luxury and the economic power of the Church as well as misguided beliefs about the power and efficacy of material objects. Theological debate only addressed the theological issues involved, which were much narrower and much more focused than the larger social issues.

One may wonder whether among its manifold functions there was an aesthetic dimension to the experience of medieval art. It was possible for artists to exert themselves beyond the minimal demands of display and to exercise a high degree of skill in the practice of their craft. Manuscript illumination, in particular the *Book of Kells*, was a case in point. The grotesques and drolleries in the margins of later manuscripts were a clear demonstration of imagination run riot both on the part of the artist and the spectator. It wouldn’t have been



done unless there were an appreciative audience. As long as one thinks of aesthetic response in terms of classical ideals of beauty and sublimity, one stands alienated from the more curious delights of medieval art. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, in a letter to the abbot William of Thierry, demanded to know the attractions of church decoration:

In the cloister under the eyes of brethren who read there, what profit is there in those ridiculous monsters, in that marvellous and deformed beauty, in that beautiful deformity? To what purpose are those unclean apes, those fierce lions, those monstrous centaurs, those half-men, those striped tigers, those fighting knights, those hunters winding their horns? . . . In short, so many and marvelous are the varieties of shapes on every hand, that we are more tempted to read in the marble than in our books, and to spend the whole day wondering at these things rather than in meditating the law of God. For God's sake, if men are not ashamed of these follies, why at least do they not shrink from the expense?<sup>26</sup>

As Meyer Schapiro pointed out, this was an attack on profane, not religious, images without any didactic meaning. Nevertheless, in the Cistercian manuscript of the Homilies of Gregory on Job, Bernard's own order depicted scenes from daily life "astoundingly modern in their freedom of conception and precise drawing, rich in finely observed details, perhaps the first observations of their kind in medieval art." Another Cistercian complained:

Beautiful pictures, varied sculptures, both adorned with gold, beautiful and precious cloths, beautiful weavings of varied color, beautiful and precious windows, sapphire glass, gold-embroidered copes and chausibles, golden and jewelled chalices, gold letters in books: all these are not required for practical needs, but for the concupiscence of the eyes.<sup>27</sup>

While they might not have been practical, they were certainly functional, indeed multifunctional: craftsmen exercising their skills to the greater glory of God, patrons creating a fitting house for the Lord and visions of a divine, un-earthly world. All could be enjoyed for their sheer delight.

Boccaccio, in his *Decameron*, celebrated Giotto as the painter who "had brought back to light that art that had been buried for centuries under the errors of those who painted to delight the eyes of the ignorant than to please the intellect of the wise."<sup>28</sup> The pictorial experience of an image created, once again, on the spectator principle to celebrate the Passion of Christ and the deeds of St. Francis invited a different kind of response to the rich fabrics of the earlier church. But surely Giotto's *The Mourning of Christ* (1306) was as much an invitation to lamentation as a demonstration of a new form of artistic skill, an invitation to empathetic meditation as well as rational recognition. Alberti, in his much-later treatise *De pictura*, had recommended that there should be a figure in the painted "historia"

who tells the spectator what is going on, and either beckons them with his hand to look, or with ferocious expression and forbidding glance challenges them not to come near, as if he wished their business to be secret, or points to some danger or remarkable thing in the picture, or by his gestures invites you to laugh or weep with them.<sup>29</sup>

This invitation to empathetic response was not far away from the kinds of demands exercised by the contemporary Netherlandish devotional images.<sup>30</sup>

## TRANSITIONS TO MODERNITY



Prior to the Italian Renaissance, visual imagery had been dominated by familiar themes, whether from life, from the Bible, or from popularly shared stories, and it fulfilled familiar functions: worship, celebration, commemoration, instruction, decoration, and ornamentation. Pictorial methods were again familiar: representation, symbolization, allegory, and demonstration. Hidden meanings were not the order of the day and the artist functioned as a craftsman producing goods on commission. Spectators could be visually appreciative of the way in which the artist handled his subjects. There was a period in antiquity when Romans, appreciative of Greek artists' skills, collected their work without regard to their religious functions and commissioned copies. In the Italian Renaissance, again, patrons started to commission and buy artists' works without regard to their specific functions, simply as demonstrations of their artists' skills for their private collections.<sup>31</sup> The production of "works of art" in their modern sense impinged on the public domain and became obvious through such things as the transformation of the altarpiece.<sup>32</sup>

Raphael's *Stanza della Segnatura* is a case in point of a set of paintings that was traditional in its function but new in its compositional principles. The so-called *School of Athens*, for example, is not a complex demonstration of the interrelationship between philosophical systems, as some commentators have thought, but an image of an exemplary set of philosophers maintaining the tradition of representing philosophy by displaying a philosopher. In the Middle Ages, sculptural reliefs of the arts had signified philosophy by Aristotle, rhetoric by Cicero, grammar by Donatus, and so on. Being allocated a wall for philosophy gave Raphael the opportunity to represent a clutch of philosophers that he had to do in a visually interesting way. Michelangelo's comments on the difference between Italian and Flemish painting are revelatory about what he saw as their respective merits:

In Flanders they paint, with a view to deceiving sensual vision, such things as may cheer you and of which you cannot speak ill, as for example saints and prophets. The paint stuffs and masonry, the green grass of the fields, the

shadow of trees, and rivers and bridges, which they call landscapes, with many figures on this side and many figures on that. And all this, though it pleases some persons, is done without reason or art, without symmetry or proportion, without skillful selection or boldness and, finally, without substance or vigor.<sup>33</sup>

Michelangelo's paintings and sculptures were not esoteric in their meanings though they were conspicuous displays of his skill. A painting such as *The Last Judgement* was a compositional *tour de force* but was not intended to strike terror into the hearts of its spectators as were the Northern paintings of the same subjects. It could be captured under the notion of "terrible sublimity," but that was a sublimity of the rhetoricians and as such it was celebrated by Sir Joshua Reynolds in his last and fifteenth *Discourse*.

The sixteenth century witnessed the emergence of printed texts discussing the fine points of the art of painting, and it became recognized as a subject fit for discussion in cultured circles. Patrons' advisors began to suggest ideas for interesting and out-of-the-way subjects; this affected not just painting but the design of festivities as well.<sup>34</sup> At the opposite end of the spectrum, the Reformation had the effect of turning Dutch painters away from religious subjects and channeling their energies into secular imagery: portraits, landscapes, still lifes, and images of domestic and public life. Gentlemen's manuals contained discussions of painting and the work of painters and specialized texts such as Jonathan Richardson's *Two Discourses: An Essay on the Art of Criticism and an Argument in Behalf of the Science of a Connoisseur* (1719) assumed a kind of popularity. Connoisseurs were expected to refine their skills in front of easily available prints after famous paintings; they commissioned copies of their favorite works and set about forming their own collections of originals and fakes.

There is a substantial and growing debate over the various mental sets that spectators were expected to assume in front of paintings. That is too large a subject to deal with here.<sup>35</sup> Of considerable importance was the growing number of salons where paintings would be exhibited to the general public. The French king opened his birthday salon to the public in 1737 and the phenomenon of public art criticism was born. Cochin, the secretary to the French Academy, felt that no good would come of it:

This sort of publication can degenerate in no time to criticisms, mockery, and baseless judgments. Any writer will soon persuade himself that negativity amuses the public and can see his work. Self-interest runs the show, and it will become no more than a periodical series of insults which would aggrieve our artists, close the studios, and ruin public exhibitions, which are more useful to the arts than are the arguments of literary men who know nothing.<sup>36</sup>

He was not wrong. Work that had been produced to satisfy the needs of the court and wealthy clients for the decoration of their private apartments

received a mixed response. The problem was not so much what the subjects were as what the audience was expected to gain by looking at them. The Revolution put an end to court and church patronage and painters looked for their new audience among the middle class through state-sponsored salons. A cleavage emerged between artists who sought to make a public appeal and those who catered for a more select and pictorially cultured audience; the disparity was described with great insight by Émile Zola in his novel, *L'Oeuvre* (1886).

A classic case of conflict between an artist and his audience was Manet's exhibition of *Olympia* at the Salon of 1865. Théophile Gautier wrote of it:

With some repugnance I come to the peculiar paintings by Manet. It is awkward to discuss them but one cannot pass them by in silence. . . . In many person's opinion it would be enough to dismiss them with a laugh; that is a mistake. Manet is by no means negligible; he has a school, he has admirers and even enthusiasts; his influence extends further than you think. Manet has the distinction of being a danger. But the danger has now passed. *Olympia* can be understood from no point of view, even if you take it for what it is, a puny model stretched out on a sheet. The color of the flesh is dirty, the modeling nonexistent. The shadows are indicated by more or less large smears of blacking. What is to be said for the Negress who brings a bunch of flowers wrapped in a paper, or for the black cat which leaves its dirty foot-prints on the bed? We would still forgive the ugliness, were it only truthful, carefully studied, heightened by some splendid effect of color. The least beautiful woman has bones, muscles, skin, and some sort of color. Here is nothing, we are sorry to say, but the desire to attract attention at any price.<sup>37</sup>

This passage has been quoted at length because it is a prime example of an intelligent and cultivated spectator admitting complete defeat in front of an image. By 1865 the Parisians were familiar with realism as an alternative to conventional academicism, romanticism, and classicism, thus it was not the case that Gautier only had one model of artistic excellence by which to judge the work. It was just so novel that he found it utterly unintelligible. Only acclimatization to the new mode of painting and demonstrations of conspicuous failure could generate an accommodating mental set. Fortunately, artists such as Manet and Monet did not have to gain the approval of the Parisian populace to become successful and make a living out of their art.

Experiments with visual difficulty became a central feature of modernist avant-garde art. Monet was concerned to paint the world as it was seen. In June 1890 he wrote to his friend Gustave Geffroy: "I have gone back to some things that can't possibly be done: water with weeds waving at the bottom. It is a wonderful sight, but it drives one crazy trying to paint it. But that is the kind of thing that I am always tackling."<sup>38</sup> Almost a century earlier the English writer William Gilpin had counseled:

The appearance of blue and purple trees, unless in the remote distance, offends, and though the artist may have authority from nature for his prac-

tice, yet the spectator, not versed in such effects, may be displeased. Painting, like poetry, is intended to excite pleasure. . . . Neither poetry or painting is a proper vehicle of learning. The painter will do well to avoid every uncommon appearance in nature.<sup>39</sup>

Ironically, Monet became one of the world's most popular painters as the general public accommodated to his new style of painting the visual world and discovered the truth behind his paintings of appearance.

Even greater difficulties were posed by the invention of Cubism that, in reality, aimed at breaking down the conventional expectations of the painted picture. Gleizes and Metzinger, who had rather different ambitions from Picasso and Braque, invoked Riemann's non-Euclidean geometry to argue that their own painting transcended "the imagination of the vulgar" in the interests of a profounder truth.<sup>40</sup> Daniel Kahnweiler complicated matters even further by advancing quite a different argument: as the artist could not transcribe reality, naturalism was a form of writing and Cubism was just a further development in the creation of symbols that could be learned to stand for reality:

We must not forget something that is absolutely fundamental . . . to the comprehension of Cubism and . . . modern art: the fact that *painting is a form of writing*. Painting is a form of writing that creates signs. A woman in a painting is not a woman; she is a group of signs that I read as "woman." When one writes on a sheet of paper "f-e-m-m-e," someone who knows French and who knows how to read will read not only the word "femme," but he will see, so to speak, a woman. The same is true of painting; there is no difference. Fundamentally, painting has never been a mirror of the external world, nor has it ever been similar to photography; it has been a creation of signs, which were always read correctly by contemporaries, after a certain apprenticeship, of course. Well, the Cubists created signs that were unquestionably new, and this is what made it so difficult to read their paintings for such a long time.<sup>41</sup>

There had always been a battle to defend abstract art in the face of its philistine critics and one argument that was frequently used was that naturalistic painting was actually just as conceptual as abstraction. What is being described here is the phenomenon of inculcation, and theorists such as Rudolph Arnheim and Nelson Goodman have argued that the perception of resemblance is simply a matter of familiarity. Arnheim believed that just as the public has experienced difficulty in recognizing the realism of Cézanne and Renoir, the day would come when they would recognize the realism of "the Picassos, the Braques, the Klee's":

Today we can hardly imagine that less than a century ago the paintings of Cézanne and Renoir were rejected not only because of their unusual style, but because they in fact looked offensively unreal. It was not merely a matter of different judgment, but of different perception. Our forefathers saw on those canvases incoherent patches of paint that we are no longer able to see, and they based their judgment on what they saw.<sup>42</sup>

It is not hard to believe that the general public should have taken offense at paintings by Cézanne and Renoir, for the reasons spelled out by William Gilpin. We can still see the patches but we are not offended by them. It is, however, quite a different matter that we should come to recognize the realism of the Picassos, because that was precisely what he had aimed against. Analytic Cubism, unlike the art of Cézanne and Renoir, was intended to defeat the conventional expectation to see objects represented in space. Synthetic Cubism was intended to disrupt conventions of illusion and reality with its use of real-world surfaces: newspapers, veneers, and the like. Margaret Hagen's description of Picasso's portrait of Ambroise Vollard as "quite incredibly lifelike"<sup>43</sup> simply beggars belief.

### MENTAL SET



In a review of Charles Morris's *Signs, Language and Behaviour*, Gombrich was critical of the notion of the iconic sign: an image of a cat on a mat can attract any number of true statements and is not simply a verbal equivalent of "a cat sits on a mat." An image of a man may be a portrait of that man, but might alternatively be a picture of a butler. Images have to be aided by language to gain a representational function. More importantly for our topic, Gombrich suggested that in the light of his minimal images of gondoliers, Guardi relied on the spectator to read "iconicity" into his sign and that

the contextual, emotional, or formal means by which this type of interpretation is evoked or facilitated—in other words, the relation between objective "iconicity" and psychological projecting—would have to form one of the main fields of study of a descriptive semiotic of the image. Perhaps it will show that the history of "seeing" is really the history of a learning process through which a socially coherent public was trained by the artist to respond in a given manner to certain abbreviated signs.<sup>44</sup>

This theory could, if taken in a radical way, support the line of thought proposed by Arnheim and Goodman. In its developed form in *Art and Illusion* it did not.

In a lecture given to the British Psychological Association at Durham in 1955, Gombrich considered the problems presented by the Rorschach inkblot test:

Rorschach has emphasized that the experiment is really one of matching. We match our memory images, or engrams as he calls them, against the fresh stimuli issuing from the card. Where we are aware of the matching of both sides of the equation we know that we interpret, where we know nothing of it we call perceiving. There must be a differing threshold, he says, that distinguishes one from the other, but the two merge.<sup>45</sup>

Put an artist in an experiment to copy a Rorschach blot and the copy can be achieved by a process of matching. The ultimate product would be a facsimile that offers as many different possible interpretations as the original. When confronted with nonsense figures, the artist starts with an interpretational schema and can then proceed by way of correction. Looking back at the history of art, one can see that artists have followed the practice of schema and correction. There is evidence in the British Museum that Egyptian artists proceeded this way as much as artists of the Renaissance; there are tablets on which formal drawing conventions have been tried out and corrected in the same way that drawing masters would later correct life drawings from the model. The business of the Egyptian artist was to produce images that would facilitate identification. The business of the naturalistic artists of antiquity and the Renaissance and modern period to the Impressionists was to produce images that would facilitate projection of a convincing image of the visible world. The history of artistic technique of those periods was one of growing sophistication in the development of projective methods that would be convincing and appealing. In his recent book *Shadows: The Depiction of Cast Shadows in Western Art* (1995), Gombrich demonstrated that in one period of Renaissance art, shadows were both discovered and subsequently dropped because of compositional interference, only to be used again for dramatic effect.

One way of describing the history of naturalistic imagery is to say that artists have taught us to see, in the sense of drawing attention to aspects of appearance that in the normal course of events occur unregarded, like colored shadows. Another way of describing it is to suggest that artists have developed conventions—that is, procedures—for constructing images that can afford convincing images. A case in point was Brunelleschi's invention of one-point linear perspective.

When we look at the world around us there is a constancy to the appearance of objects. The same object may pass through a variety of lighting conditions, for example, and yet still be recognizable as the same object. A man walking away from us down a street will gradually get smaller, but he will not seem to turn into a smaller man: he is the same man, but smaller. Similarly, a hand held up to my face would not appear as a huge hand, shrinking in size as it is moved away. What Brunelleschi discovered was that to simulate changes in apparent size, the artist had to regulate his construction of objects in a distance by a mathematical rule. That rule yields a surprising result: depicted objects in a distance are, as painted images, smaller than they would appear to be to natural vision. This can be demonstrated in a photographic montage of lamp posts trailing off into the distance down a street.<sup>46</sup> Cut out the lamp post at the end of the street and place it next to the lamp post in the foreground and one will be surprised to discover that the smaller lamp post will appear to have shrunk. The correlative surprise is that if one adjusts the smaller lamp post to the size one thinks it ought to be and then montages it back to its original place, it will throw the perspective out of skew.

A number of writers have suggested that imagery constructed on the basis of one-point linear perspective has to be looked at from a specific station point, otherwise the image would not be convincing. This is clearly wrong, as our experience of looking at television and film screens would demonstrate. We experience no difficulty in being captured by the events on the screen irrespective of where we sit. It is only anamorphic imagery that demands a particular viewing point, and the whole point behind such imagery is to generate surprise from an incongruous image.

Other surprising results emerge from the study of color relationships. The best example of this is the so-called "spreading effect":

Only two colors are used, one tone of red and one of blue. If they look different in combination with different patterns of black and white, this is due to their mutual influence, which no one claims to understand completely: we obviously do not see the ground in isolation; we see the whole pattern as one and attribute its total brightness or darkness to its elements. There is only one way of convincing ourselves that it is only the proximity of white which makes for the impression of a brighter background while the proximity of black casts a shadow over its surroundings. We must follow with the eye the stripes of color that lead from the gloomy part to the bright region. There is no break.<sup>47</sup>

The painter must learn to accommodate to the visual effects that different regions of colored pigment have on one another to control the total effect of his painting. The same red will look different depending on whether it is in proximity to, or surrounded by, a black or a white.

It is absolutely surprising that artists can generate convincing effects from a wide range of pictorial conventions. One has only to think of the contrast between the immaculately detailed imagery of a Holbein and the loose brushwork of a Rembrandt, the finely honed drawings of the Nazarenes against the rough sketches of a Degas. Perhaps most surprising of all was the invention of caricature: while its artifice is apparent for all to see, the best caricatures can capture a person's characteristic appearance to the point of transforming it in reality. One can choose one's own favorite caricatures to make the point. It is interesting, though, that as a technique it emerged at quite a specific place and time, in the circle of the Carracci at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although specific features of a person have been noticed and remarked on through history and across cultures, the familiar grotesque is different in kind from the individual caricature. The Italian humanist Filefo (1398–1481), in a moment of hatred towards Lorenzo Medici, could write, "Look at Lorenzo's sides, at his head, at his gait! Does he not know when he speaks? Look at the mouth and the tongue, the mucous slipping out of his nostrils. The head boasts its horns."<sup>48</sup> Any artist who drew that in Lorenzo's day would not have lived long before being assassinated. It took a major change in climate for such drawings to be valued.



## WOLLHEIM'S OBJECTION



Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* revealed the extent to which the history of naturalistic art has been one of visual discovery. Early printers could happily use the same image to picture different cities, but as topographic art developed, so did visual differentiation. The artist Robert Garland could mistakenly portray the cathedral at Chartres with Romanesque windows on its west facade out of his schema for Gothic cathedrals. Spectators would not notice Garland's mistake if they had not been to Chartres and paid specific attention to its windows. Dürer's woodcut of a rhinoceros would not satisfy a contemporary zoologist interested in having a scientifically useful image, though she might be happy enough to have it on her wall as a work of art. Whether an artist like Monet could capture the most elusive appearances is another matter. His late paintings, produced in his garden at Giverny, offer fields for visual experience that come close, with the attendant risk of dissolving into chaos like Frenhofer's masterpiece in Balzac's novel.

Richard Wollheim has turned Gombrich's theory of depiction into a theory of perception and argued that if all perception operates by way of regulation through schema, there can be no "exit to the object,"<sup>49</sup> as if it were actually the case that seeing an object is qualitatively the same as seeing a picture. In fact, the objects of experience, pictures, and the world differ radically in their nature as objects.

Gombrich has argued that normal perception is, indeed, based upon hypotheses about the visual environment. His approach is not inductive, like Richard Gregory's,<sup>50</sup> and he does not take the view that the child learns to see the world by making inferences from collections of experience. Instead, he uses the Popperian fallibilistic model: we may occasionally misrecognize objects in the world, taking things to be what they are not. We may also assume that we see more than we actually do, simply because the visual experience that we have is sufficient to get on with our business. When we look at a distant tree we can see its outline shape, but we cannot see the specific orientations of all of its branches. If we wanted to be more specific in identifying its characteristics as an object, we would have to walk around it. Perception is instrumental and human perception is highly effective, though there are rare occasions when we are left guessing about what we see. If those were not rare, the human race would not have survived as long as it has.

The artist is in a position to make corrections to his images if he believes such corrections to be important. The problem lay in developing skills of representation adequate to the objects of representation. Renaissance artists discovered that in order to make convincing representations of the human body they had to turn to anatomy and dissection. Consequently, only a skilled anatomist would be able to appreciate the fine points of Michelangelo's representation of Adam on the Sistine Chapel. It doesn't take a skilled anatomist, however, to appreciate the points of difference between Leonardo's angel and

Verrochio's in Verrochio's *Baptism* (c. 1472) and the grotesque appearance of St. John's right arm.

## PICTORIAL EXPERIENCE PAST AND PRESENT



The rise of museums in the nineteenth century led to a situation where the general public encountered paintings outside of their original context and contextualized with other paintings from the same country and time. Only now are museums reviewing their hanging policies, although the Victoria and Albert Museum in London has had the long-standing practice of locating paintings in period rooms and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York has rooms dedicated to the collecting tastes of its donors. Only visits to works of art *in situ* would begin to give a sense of how they might have functioned for their original spectators: an altarpiece in place at an altar, a family portrait along others in the long gallery of an English country house. Looking at Masaccio's *Tribute Money* along with other scenes from the life of Saint Peter in the Brancacci Chapel will invite consideration of its place in a decorative scheme and diminish the tendency to think of it as a single image having significance within a moment of political life between Florence and Rome. Religious paintings were produced for permanence. They were part of the very fabric of the church and had more than transient significance. Secular paintings were commissioned for purposes and places as well. Without being aware of the circumstances of the production of Botticelli's *Primavera*, we know that it was painted for a person for a reason, we recognize the connections between its figures and the figures in contemporary religious paintings, and we feel that there is a moral to it somewhere. Paintings were enjoyed for their particularity, not for exemplifying a type.

The Parthenon stands stripped of its sculptural reliefs that are now housed in the British Museum. Even if they were restored to their original location, the Parthenon itself stands alone on the Acropolis, in the sense that its spectators are tourists with no sense of the continuities of the sculptural relief with religious life and the building with other buildings.

Spectators and worshippers in churches were familiar with the Bible and used to reflecting on its stories and its characters. This is a specialized form of knowledge that is floating off into a distant horizon. Passages of text no longer spring to mind when we look at a particular religious scene, and consulting a handbook like Hall's *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* offers the possibility of identification but not a sense of recognition. Some Christian traditions still form part of our daily life, like the celebration of Christmas, but only a few people have ever had the privilege of looking at Rubens's depiction of the Adoration of the Magi as the King's College choir sings carols in the chapel on Christmas Eve. With thoughts of unwrapping presents on Christmas Day we can vicariously participate in the experience of the Magi offering their gifts

to the Christ child. The more normal experience of pictures is to trudge past them, feet aching, in aseptic museums or blockbuster exhibitions, which have a kind of saturation effect. One Dutch still life can be extremely enjoyable, but to experience a whole room full of them in the Ashmolean Museum is quite a challenging experience.

In the absence of being able to respond to them in any other way, spectators are encouraged to savor the visual flavor of paintings or are instructed on representations of middle-class life in eighteenth-century England in the presence of a painting by Gainsborough or Reynolds. This is not to suggest that the paintings of the past must necessarily rest opaque, but that a lot of what passes for art appreciation at the moment is misplaced. There are exceptions: Rembrandt's domestic subjects and scenes from the Bible still evoke some depth of recognition. But then we are not talking about just pictures but genuine works of art.

## NOTES



1. Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art*, trans. M. D. Hottinger (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1932), p. 11.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

3. Quoted by Richard Wollheim, in his modified translation, in "On Drawing an Object," in *On Art and the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 3.

4. Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1976).

5. Marx Wartofsky, "Art History and Perception," in *Perceiving Artworks*, ed. J. Fisher (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980). Note that the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (vol. 59, no. 1 [winter 2001]) features a symposium, "The Historicity of the Eye." I share Arthur Danto's assessment of Wartofsky's position.

6. Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History*, op. cit., p. 51. See Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. C. Grayson (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1991), p. 46: "Reflected rays assume the color they find on the surface from which they are reflected. We see this happen when the faces of people walking about in meadows appear to have a greenish tinge."

7. Alois Riegl, *Late Roman Art Industry*, trans. R. Winkes (1901; reprint, Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider Editore, 1985), p. 24.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 231–32. Riegl's view of the relationship between ancient magic and modern science was not as crazy in the early twentieth century as it might sound today. Current popularizations of contemporary science mystified the perception of objects, an example being Whitehead's notion that when we look at a table we don't actually see a table but a swarm of atoms. Contemporary theosophy had a lot to answer for as well.

10. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. H. Zohn (London: Fontana, 1973), p. 224.

11. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1992).

12. Heinrich Schäfer, *Principles of Egyptian Art*, trans. J. Baines (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1986), p. 347.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 80–81.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 110.
17. H. A. Groenewegen-Frankfort, *Arrest and Movement: Space and Time in the Art of the Ancient Near East* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), pp. 37–38.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
19. "J. Bodonyi, Entstehung und Bedeutung des Goldgrundes in der spätantiken Bildkomposition (Archaeologiai Értesítő, 46, 1932/3)," *Kritische Berichte zur Kunstgeschichtlichen Literatur* 5 (1932/33 [published in 1935]): 65–75.
20. Caecilia Davis-Weyer, *Early Medieval Art, 300–1150* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 48.
21. The Trilling Seminar (Columbia University, New York, 1987), "Style, Skill, and Function in Image Making," unpublished manuscript, pp. 9–10. (Cited by courtesy of Sir Ernst Gombrich.)
22. Paulinus of Nola (early fourth century) quoted in Davis-Weyer, *Early Medieval Art, 300–1150*, op. cit., p. 19.
23. "Ernst Gombrich discusses the concept of cultural history with Peter Burke," *The Listener* (December, 27, 1973): 881–83.
24. Exodus 20:4–5.
25. André Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of its Origins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968).
26. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, quoted by Meyer Schapiro in "On the Aesthetic Attitude in Romanesque Art," in *Romanesque Art: Selected Papers* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1993), p. 6.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
28. Boccaccio, *Decameron*, giornata VI, novella 5. Quoted by E. H. Gombrich in "Visual Metaphors of Value in Art," in *Meditations on a Hobby Horse* (London: Phaidon Press, 1963), p. 17.
29. Alberti, *On Painting*, op. cit., pp. 77–78.
30. On which, see Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting*, rev. ed. (Doornspijk: Davaco Publishers, 1984).
31. On this topic, see the essays collected together in E. H. Gombrich, *The Uses of Images: Studies in the Social Function of Art and Visual Communication* (London: Phaidon Press, 1999).
32. *Ibid.*, "Paintings for Altars: Their Evolution, Ancestry and Progeny."
33. From Francisco Hollanda's *Four Dialogues* in Robert Klein and Henri Zerner, *Italian Art, 1500–1600* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 34.
34. On this topic, see E. H. Gombrich, "Introduction: Aims and Limits of Iconology," in *Symbolic Images* (London, 1972), as well as James M. Saslow, *The Medici Wedding of 1589: Florentine Festival as Theatrum Mundi* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).
35. See, for example, the debate over eighteenth-century French painting started by Michael Fried's *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), and the debate over seventeenth-

century Dutch painting, surveyed in Wayne Franits (ed.), *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

36. Quoted by Thomas E. Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 9.

37. Quoted by John Rewald, *The History of Impressionism* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973), pp. 123–24.

38. Richard Friedenthal, *Letters of the Great Artists: From Blake to Pollock* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1963), p. 129.

39. William Gilpin, *Forest Scenery*, quoted in E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Reprint, Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1986), p. 323.

40. Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, *Du cubisme* (Paris, 1912), excerpted in Herschel B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 207–16.

41. Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, *My Galleries and Painters* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971), p. 57.

42. Rudolph Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: The New Version* (1954; reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 137.

43. Margaret Hagen, *Varieties of Realism: Geometries of Representational Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 223.

44. E. H. Gombrich, "Signs, Language and Behaviour," in *Reflections on the History of Art*, ed. R. Woodfield (1949; reprint, Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1987), p. 248.

45. E. H. Gombrich, "Art History and the Psychology of Perception," unpublished manuscript dated April 17, 1955, p. 10. (Cited by courtesy of Sir Ernst Gombrich.)

46. See the montage in E. H. Gombrich, "Visual Discovery through Art," in *The Image and the Eye: Further Studies in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1982), illustration 6, p. 19.

47. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, op. cit., p. 260, and see color plate VI.

48. E. H. Gombrich and Ernst Kris, "The Principles of Caricature," in Ernst Kris, *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), p. 195n.

49. Wollheim, "Reflections on Art and Illusion," in *On Art and the Mind*, op. cit., p. 283.

50. R. L. Gregory, *Eye and Brain: The Psychology of Seeing*, 3rd rev. ed. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1986). And consult his later works.

## CHAPTER SIX

# *The Aesthetic Experience of Literature and Its Cognitive Value*



ROBERT STECKER

In this chapter I will identify one conception of what it is to experience a literary work aesthetically. I do not claim that it is the only legitimate conception of the aesthetic experience of literature. As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> there is no one, unique, right conception of such experience, and if one wants to work with the notion of the aesthetic, the choice is to some extent a matter of stipulation. I will then go on to argue that a plausible conception of the cognitive value of literature is symbiotically related to this conception of aesthetic experience.

## AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE



The term “aesthetic” has the double disadvantage of being a technical expression, having been introduced into philosophy in the eighteenth century, but lacking the chief virtue of technical terms: a clear and generally agreed upon meaning. Even when we speak more specifically of “aesthetic experience” or “aesthetic value,” there is no agreement about what these are. “Aesthetic value” is frequently used to refer to whatever is valuable about art, that is, as a synonym of “artistic value.” However, that indiscriminate use of the term would serve us badly here, where the purpose is to pick out several, distinct, artistically valuable functions.

I take for granted that aesthetic value resides in some sort of experience we value for its own sake, usually, though not always, of a enjoyable character,

taken in and directed toward (not merely caused by) an object. Accounts of aesthetic value may focus either more on an experience or more on an object, but an adequate account cannot neglect either.

One traditional account of aesthetic experience characterizes it as pleasure taken in a *perceptual* experience of an object, in which its *formal* features (however defined) are foregrounded, and in which the spectator is *disinterested* at least in the sense that he or she contemplates the object for its own sake and not for the sake of some ulterior practical purpose.<sup>2</sup> This traditional characterization has received much criticism<sup>3</sup> and justly so. Not all aesthetic experience is primarily perceptual, the aesthetic experience of literature being a case in point. In the case of the aesthetic experience of artworks, representational features can be just as important as formal ones. Finally, since artworks typically have more than one valuable function, their spectators need not be disinterested in the sense just specified. It may be that in some sense they contemplate the work for its own sake (or for the sake of appreciatively experiencing it), but it does not follow that one does not have other, more or less practical, purposes made possible by art's other valuable functions.

Given these inadequacies, it is not surprising that various alternative conceptions of aesthetic experience or pleasure have appeared. An alternative offered by Kendall Walton that is instructively distant from the one just sketched proposes that aesthetic pleasure is pleasure that has two components: a) pleasure taken in an object, and b) pleasure taken in one's admiration or positive evaluation of that object.<sup>4</sup> On this account, what is distinctive about aesthetic pleasure (and presumably the aesthetic experience of an object if one wishes to speak of aesthetic experience as well as aesthetic pleasure), is the second component—the pleasure taken in one's positive evaluation of an object. The account is quite unspecific regarding the first component, regarding the sort of pleasure one takes in the object itself.

I do not doubt that there is such a thing as pleasure taken in the positive evaluation of an object, though this is perhaps a pleasure that is apt to go unnoticed. I do not find it, however, a likely candidate for the distinctive component of aesthetic pleasure. Consider: "The owner of a hoe . . . might . . . appreciate and admire how marvelously suited the hoe . . . is to its task. This gives her a certain enjoyment in using the tool (and perhaps just in owning it). . . . It seems not unreasonable to describe this enjoyment as 'aesthetic' appreciation."<sup>5</sup> Well, if not unreasonable (for one may choose to use a word in any way one likes so long as one makes plain what that use is), it does strike me as idiosyncratic to so designate this appreciation of the hoe, at least if all that one admires is the tool's efficient hoeing. One is then admiring the hoe as one can admire the bolts that hold together airplanes. Imagine that you have just landed in Tokyo after a fourteen-hour flight from New York. You think of the bolts that have held together the airplane you are in, and admire their efficiency in keeping it in one piece after this and so many previous flights. This gives you a certain pleasure. I have not the slightest inclination to call this aesthetic pleasure, because it is so distant from what is typically so called. One

never lays eyes on the bolts, one never contemplates any of their peculiar qualities. Similarly, one may never really notice the hoe (as opposed to its efficient hoeing). It would be a different matter if one took pleasure in the way the look of the hoe, or a certain design and arrangement of parts, was suggestive of its good hoeing (though I think it important that the suggestion is not illusory). However, notice that now it is a certain way of experiencing the object, rather than one's judgment about it, that is distinctive of one's pleasure.

My first reaction to Walton's suggestion is that, rather than characterizing *aesthetic* pleasure, it plausibly characterizes appreciation of any kind, aesthetic or not. The hoe-owner clearly appreciates her hoe even if the appreciation is not aptly called aesthetic. However, on reflection, one can also doubt the proposal's plausibility as an account of appreciation. Appreciation does not require a judgment of value, though it is perfectly natural for such a judgment to accompany appreciation, and, furthermore, the latter provides all the reasons one needs for a judgment of value. One appreciates a hoe if one notices its good hoe-making qualities (without necessarily judging them to be such) and takes pleasure in using it to fulfill its proper function. One needn't actually judge that it is a marvelous hoe. Similarly, one appreciates a poem if one notices various features that make it a good poem and in the process takes pleasure in the poem. One needn't actually judge it to be a good poem.

So Walton's proposed way of defining aesthetic experience covers too many instances where the experience is normally not thought of as aesthetic (as when one takes pleasure in thinking one's hoe marvelous because of its efficiency) and leaves out others where the experience is aesthetic (as when one appreciates a poem in certain ways without making any judgment of value). Aesthetic experience is more object-directed (as opposed to attitude-directed) than this proposal has it, and, like appreciation, does not require a judgment of value.

It would be possible to explore many more proposals that either are variations on the traditional one already stated or are revisionary conceptions.<sup>6</sup> Let us instead work our way from the simpler kinds of perceptual aesthetic pleasures, easily captured by the traditional conception, to complex ones more typical of the appreciation of visual art to a conception of the aesthetic appreciation of literary works. One important subset of aesthetic experiences consists in the pleasurable experience of appearances enjoyed for their own sake (or for the sake of the enjoyable experience itself) as they present themselves to the senses. We can distinguish three sorts of appearances: there are *phenomenal appearances*—those that result from the joint operation of the properties of the object, the conditions of the subject, and background conditions. The purple appearance of a mountain range at dusk would be an example of a phenomenal appearance. In contrast to this, there is a thing's *true appearance*—the properties that appear when we veridically perceive an object. Examples of this would be the vermilion color of a sports car or of a cloak in a painting. (Some objects may lack a true appearance, for example, a mountain range.) Another kind of appearance is mentioned when we say that a car looks fast,



or a weeping willow looks sad. I don't know of a good name for this kind of appearance. We could call it *characteristic appearance*, because the appearance brings out or expresses a character the object is supposed or seems to have.

We can enjoy noticing all three kinds of appearances just for the sake of doing so, and hence we can have aesthetic experiences involving each. However, when it comes to the aesthetic experience of artworks, we are not usually interested in *their* phenomenal appearance. For example, while we can take considerable pleasure in noticing the precise appearance that a mountain happens to present to one from this vantage point, during this season, on this particular day, at this hour, one is not so interested in just any phenomenal appearance a painting happens to present; for example, one in which glare is the most prominent feature. Rather, we are interested in a painting's true appearance (as we move about to eliminate glare among other things) and the characteristic appearances it presents. This is not to imply, however, that it is always unproblematic what a painting's true appearance is or that there are no exceptions to this rule.

The things that most clearly have a true appearance in a painting are low-level perceptual features: a patch of cerulean (which happens to represent a lake) or to complex shape (which happens to represent an arm). We can certainly take pleasure in noticing these things, a pleasure to which I would not want to deny the appellation "aesthetic." However, far more typical of aesthetic enjoyment of paintings is the experience of noticing the interaction of these low-level perceptual features with both representational ones (including representations of phenomenal appearances) and matters of larger formal design. It is then that those low-level features take on characteristic appearances (e.g., the arm-representing shape becomes not only complex but dynamic). Our interest in a painting's represented world, and the form that embodies it, is hardly limited to the way it arises from lower level features. The contemplation of these forms and meanings takes the aesthetic experience of painting well beyond the enjoyable noticing of appearances.<sup>7</sup>

This is so much more true of the aesthetic experience of literature. Such experience *does* involve attending to appearances: the sound of words, the rhythm of lines, sentences, stanzas, and paragraphs, the appearance of a poem on paper. (There can be other aesthetic payoffs in appearances presented by some physical realizations of literary works, as when one encounters a work in a fine edition where one can appreciate the font in which the work is printed, the look and feel of the paper, and so on.) However, this leaves out the most important object of aesthetic experience in most works of literature: what the work presents to the imagination rather than the senses. Recognizing that the appearances interact with and contribute to the meaning presented to the imagination, I will nevertheless call the latter the core aesthetic experience of literature. It is this core experience that I will try to illuminate.

Consider "Spring," a song that occurs (along with "Winter") at the end of Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*:

*When Daisies pied and violets blue  
 And lady-smocks all silver-white  
 And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue  
 Do paint the meadows with delight,  
 The cuckoo then, on every tree,  
 Mocks married men; for thus sings he,  
 Cuckoo;  
 Cuckoo, cuckoo: O words of fear,  
 Unpleasing to a married ear!*

*When Shepherds pipe on oaten straws,  
 And merry larks are ploughmen's clocks,  
 When turtles tread, and rooks, and daws,  
 And maidens bleach their summer smocks,  
 The cuckoo then, on every tree,  
 Mocks married men; for thus sings he,  
 Cuckoo;  
 Cuckoo, cuckoo: O words of fear,  
 Unpleasing to a married ear!*

I choose this “song” because the locus of one’s appreciation is likely to be enjoyment in the scene it presents to the imagination embodied in the sounds and rhythms of the words employed to do this, rather than a profound cognitive or emotional significance that one arguably might find in other literary works. Except for the (to married men) irritating and apparently enormous abundance of cuckoos, the scene is an idyllically pretty one. The first stanza presents a splash of colors: blue, silver-white, yellow, pied, which is to say variegated with spots of different color. “Pied” not only describes the daisies in the meadow, but the spring meadow itself that the poem’s opening lays out before us. There could hardly be a closer parallel between what the poem presents to the imagination and what a painting, say a landscape by Pissaro, might present to the eye.

What happens next, in the refrain, is different. Cuckoos sing on *every tree*. This is not an accurately described spring scene. In its hardly subtle suggestion of adultery, the cuckoos mean something beyond themselves. One cannot fail to notice this, since Shakespeare makes it so explicit, but once one does so, we look back to the first stanza and forward to the next, expecting to find something more than descriptions of flowers and birds, merry ploughmen and shepherds, and maidens. One thing one finds, in contrast to cuckoos and adultery, is the whiteness of ladies smocks (both in the flowers of stanza 1 and the maidens of stanza 2). The contrast is surely there, but what is not, is some commitment in the poem to a particular way of construing the contrast. It could be construed as ironic, but it need not be. The poem is too lighthearted to be more than suggestive.

Here are two more things the poem suggests to me: the contrast between

the adultery-announcing cuckoos and the virginal smocks suggests the emotional and sexual tumult that spring so easily induces. The other idea suggested to me is *metamorphosis*. The cuckoo-buds of the first stanza are followed by (transformed into) cuckoo-birds. The silver-white ladies' smocks become real summer smocks bleached white by maidens. Finally, is there a suggestion of virginal natures becoming adulterous ones? In any case, whether or not Shakespeare intended it, emotional tumult and metamorphosis of many kinds are typical of spring.

Taken in its totality, what the poem presents to the imagination is a partial but vivid *conception* of spring. The description of birds, flowers, and people give the conception an element one can visualize. The hyperbolic refrain about the cuckoos mocking married men gives the conception at least a little more depth, and makes it considerably more suggestive. The core aesthetic experience of the poem consists of taking in or contemplating with enjoyment the conception of spring that the poem presents for the sake of the enjoyment one gets from doing so. This can be generalized into an account of the core aesthetic experience of any literary work: it consists in the taking in or contemplating the conceptions it presents to the imagination for the sake of the enjoyment, or other valuable experience, one gets from doing so.

To conceive *something* is simply to think of it as having certain properties. Among our conceptions are some that are not the conception of something, for example, conceptions of round squares and golden mountains. Here we just think of a set of properties and the conception might be expressed by an open sentence, "x is F."<sup>8</sup> These two types of conceptions do not exhaust those it is possible to find in literary and other works. A work can present relational conceptions (where two or more things are thought of as being related in a certain way), or general conceptions (where some or all things within a domain are thought of as possessing a property or as being related to other things in a certain way). For each propositional form, there is a type of conception, and within a type, individual conceptions can be expressed by either open or closed sentences. In the latter case (where a conception is expressed by a closed sentence), a conception is the same thing as a proposition.

Any piece of writing, literary or not, presents conceptions in this sense, although, as is often pointed out, not typically for the sake of their enjoyable contemplation. Nevertheless, wherever such conceptions are presented, aesthetic enjoyment is possible, though it is more likely in some forms of writing than others. This is true even in the nonliterary domain. It does not strike me as so unusual to enjoy contemplating a conception of blackholes presented in an article in *Nature*, and furthermore to enjoy the contemplation for its own sake rather than for the sake of what the article was primarily intended to deliver—knowledge about blackholes. The same could happen with the conception of a vacuum cleaner presented in an article in *Consumer Reports*, but it is less likely to occur.

Literary works, as is also often pointed out, are commonly if not invariably designed for such contemplation. Fictional literary works tend to present both

sorts of conceptions mentioned above: conceptions that are of something and conceptions that are not. A lyric poem that presents a conception of a fictional someone's grief (which is a conception of the latter sort) may imply or suggest a conception of grief (which is a conception of the former sort). A novel, whose fictional characters inhabit nineteenth-century Russia, presents a conception of nineteenth-century Russia.<sup>9</sup>

We now have before us an account of the core aesthetic experience of a literary work (and more generally, of a piece of writing). However, there are ways of experiencing writing, which others have regarded as aesthetic and central to the reading of literature, that appear to be not covered by this conception. Let me mention two, the omission of which might strike the reader as serious. First, the conception of the aesthetic experience of literary works presented here seems to emphasize representational content over more formal aspects of a work. Others<sup>10</sup> have pointed out the possibilities and importance of attending to these latter features. One can attend to the shape of a novel's plot, the way complications are developed and worked out, the way it moves from episode to episode or from one point of view to another or from image to image or symbol to symbol to form a pattern. Though I haven't explicitly focused on this aspect of reading, I regard it as implicit in my account because it is crucial to attend to things like this to properly understand and appreciate the conceptions presented in literary works. Thus in attempting to understand the conception of spring presented in Shakespeare's song, we noted the symbolic significance of the cuckoos and that the use of the same words to refer to different things suggests spring-like metamorphosis. To take a different but well-known example, one cannot appreciate the conception of society presented in Dickens's *Little Dorrit* without noting the imagery of the prison house that continually recurs throughout the novel.<sup>11</sup>

Second, I have left out a reader's emotional reactions to a work. Instead, I have spoken of contemplation—a seemingly unemotional stance. If “contemplation” implies lack of emotional response, it was the wrong word to characterize the aesthetic experience of literature. What I intended was to leave open a strongly emotional response without requiring it.

## COGNITIVE VALUE OF LITERATURE



The cognitive value of literature resides in the cognitive value of the conceptions it presents. This narrows down the possible sources of cognitive value in literary works, though not the cognitive functions those conceptions might fulfill. It may well be thought to narrow them down too much, since a social practice as important, complex, and containing such a multiplicity of genres as literature is unlikely to have just one source of cognitive value. Let this be granted. It is, nevertheless, true that so much of what is most perceptive in discussions of what we learn from literature, from ancient times to the

present day, has focused on things very like what I am calling “conceptions” that it is unlikely they do not have a special importance. It is one of our tasks to find out what this importance is.

Before proceeding further, an explanation should be provided why there is a *problem* about specifying the cognitive value of literary works. As mentioned above, any piece of writing presents conceptions, but we are not particularly puzzled by the potential cognitive value of an article in *Nature* or in *Consumer Reports*. Although the class of literary works is by no means identical to the class of fictional works (since some fiction is not a part of literature and not all works of literature are works of fiction), the problem of understanding the cognitive value of literature can be reduced to understanding the cognitive value of fiction. Nonfictional literary works such as *In Rerum Natura* or *An Essay on Man* can be cognitively valuable in ways just like other nonfictional writing. They can uncontroversially make statements that are true, plausible, and well-supported by reasons or evidence. They can state laws of nature or other important generalizations. They can state arguments effectively criticizing alternative positions. The ability to possess these cognitively valuable traits hinges on the discursive function of statement-making. Where writing has this as a primary function, statements are made, conceptions are asserted and supported by reasons, evidence, or argument. In fiction, sentences are not typically used to make statements that will receive evidential or argumentative support. The primary function of fiction is not the discursive function just mentioned; it is more like the function of presenting conceptions to the imagination. Hence, if fictional literature *characteristically* has cognitive value, its basis lies in something other than in statement-making, in the asserting of conceptions and in defending them with reasons or evidence. The reason this creates a problem is that the cognitive value of writing is traditionally located in the activities I have just associated with the discursive function of statement-making. If we can solve this problem and identify cognitively valuable traits that fiction possesses, it is likely to turn out that nonfictional literature also has these traits.

To avoid confusion, we should admit that statements (asserted conceptions) may occur within works of fiction. In *War and Peace*, whole chapters are devoted to expounding a theory of historical change. This can also happen on a smaller scale; an author can introduce or conclude a work with a statement of his own as Tolstoy might be interpreted as doing in the famous opening sentence of *Anna Karenina* and Hardy is sometimes taken to task for doing at the end of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. (The alternative interpretation is that a fictional author/narrator is making these statements, in which case it is part of the fiction that they are made; they are fictionally made, but not necessarily literally made in fact.) It might be suggested that when statements occur within a work of fiction this often functions to make explicit what is already implicit. This is precisely the grounds on which Hardy is criticized regarding the final sentence of *Tess*. The claim is that Hardy had already made his point clearly enough within the action of the novel, and to make it explicit spoils the effect. This

implies that the statement was already implicit in *Tess*—not made by any one of the earlier sentences, but expressed by a larger collection of them. If this is so when an author makes a statement explicit, it could just as easily be so when he or she does not. This suggestion is not mistaken; novels and other fictional works can be vehicles for making assertions whether implicit or explicit.<sup>12</sup> However, by itself, it will not illuminate very much the cognitive value of fictional works. This is because when a work of fiction does assert something, such assertion will not typically function in the same way as it would in a discursive work. It functions not as something to be proved or supported by evidence (at least not proved or supported by evidence within the work), but somehow in connection with the work's function of presenting conceptions to the imagination. The understanding of the cognitive role of statements or assertions in fiction is subservient to understanding how the presentation of conceptions to the imagination can play a cognitive role.

Fiction is not a purely literary phenomenon but something that pervades everyday life and nonliterary writing. This claim would not be true of all conceptions of fiction. However, it is a central feature of some (such as in Walton). A weaker way of putting my point here would be to say that fiction has roots in and important similarities to certain forms of everyday thought and behavior. This point was stressed by Aristotle (*Poetics* 1448b) and could be accepted by those who would deny that some of the examples given below are examples of fiction.

The reason fiction pervades everyday life and nonliterary writing has mainly to do with the cognitive value of presenting conceptions to the imagination. We commonly find fictions in the imaginary examples that crop up in philosophy and something very like fiction in everyday decision-making. Such fictions are simpler than the elaborate ones found in novels and stories and the role they play in thinking is easier to pinpoint. So these are the fictions we should look at first.

The imaginary examples that philosophers employ are little fictions. Such examples are often employed in the process of arguing for or against a position. How do examples function in arguing against a moral theory such as utilitarianism? We invent imaginary situations and point out what we think the theory tells us to do in those situations. We try to invent situations where the theory tells us that an action is morally permissible (required, prohibited), where we think it is not permissible (required, prohibited), or vice versa.

It is controversial what we accomplish with such examples. They cannot establish all by themselves that a theory is false. However, the use of such examples accomplishes *at least* two things: first, it gets us to vividly conceive the consequences of the theory, something we may not otherwise fully *appreciate*, even when we know of these consequences. (I assume that the example's representation of the implications of a theory is accurate.) We are confronted, as it were, with what it means to act and evaluate actions on the basis of this theory. Second, it reveals to us something about ourselves: how, at least initially, we feel about the consequences and the theory that implies them. These reac-

tions can come as a surprise. When I teach the problem of abortion, I like to use an example I call “the burning test-tube baby laboratory example.” A fire suddenly breaks out in a test-tube baby laboratory in which there are three living things: a doctor, a lab assistant with a broken leg, and an embryo in a test tube. The doctor can save the lab assistant or the embryo but not both. This example helps people to vividly conceive the consequences of the view that an embryo has a right to life equal to any person, and to see how they feel initially about these consequences. This makes an important contribution in thinking about the question whether a embryo has such a right, even though it doesn’t give an answer to this question. Imaginary examples make this contribution better than most other things, though they can be replaced with real examples.

The use of fictions, or, if one balks at the use of that word, of imaginings, fulfilling the same function as that cited above for fiction, are also common in everyday thought about what to do. When we are trying to make a decision, we often need to vividly conceive our options, their supposed consequences, and to see how we feel about these once vividly conceived. We often project our possible futures, in line with the live options, in the form of scenarios—more or less elaborate fictions or imaginings.

It is easy but important not to overestimate what such fictions can give us. “This is how humans most often choose, by visualizing things; . . . imagination acted out the scene and led to a decision.”<sup>13</sup> Just as philosophical examples don’t answer, or even by themselves supply arguments for answers, to philosophical problems, fictional scenarios don’t tell us what we should do.<sup>14</sup> Rather, they allow us to see what our options (might) involve in detail, make us aware of relevant considerations we might otherwise overlook, and make us feel the force of these or relative lack of force.

Fictions like the philosophical examples and imaginary scenarios just mentioned are framed by questions, assertions, and predictions that make their cognitive role pretty obvious and allow them to feed into discursive reasoning (even if we don’t always explicitly set such reasoning out for ourselves). In novels and short stories, there is often no such explicit framework to announce the cognitive role of the fiction. Nevertheless, many literary works have a cognitive role similar to the examples discussed so far. Here is a literary example.

Laurence Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* can be read as exploring one conception of a good human being: one who is always ready to feel what others feel and goes about with this aim chiefly in mind. How does Sterne do this? First, by embodying this conception in a character who does not perfectly realize this ideal, but who is subject to errors and confusions to be expected in fallible human beings. Sterne then imagines, and shows us what he imagines in a series of episodes, what happens to this character as he meets people belonging to foreign lands. In these episodes we are shown Sterne’s conception of the pleasures of such a life (I place this first because it is emphasized most), the frustrations it encounters, the incon-

gruities misunderstanding creates, the way sympathetic impulses may conflict, and even be confused, with impulses of a very different nature—hostile, lustful, springing from prejudice.

What Sterne is doing is in many ways similar to what a philosopher using imaginary examples is doing, but there are also important differences. Both are trying to show us—by using examples in one case, a novel in another—what is involved in following a moral theory or ideal, show us in a way that makes it alive to the imagination, though in one case in its stark simplicity, in another in great detail. A difference that seems unimportant to me is that the moral philosopher is explicit about his or her aims, while Sterne's leaves us to figure out what he is doing. A difference that is important, but not to be pursued here because it is already well explored by others, is the difference in detail of representation.<sup>15</sup> Another important difference is that the philosopher goes on to supply an argument for or against the theory or ideal, often against a background of alternatives. Sterne does not supply any argument. What he does do is show us how someone of intelligence could value that sort of life that may in turn affect what we value, or at least make what we value, what we believe we ought to value, clearer to us. This comes from the vivid conceptions that fictions like *Sentimental Journey* give us, and in what we learn about ourselves when we see how we react to these conceptions.

We may very likely want to do more with the conceptions we discover in literature than to judge whether they possess an initial plausibility and to find out how we initially react to them. We are likely to want to come to a more considered evaluation of them. This is where what Martha Nussbaum, following Richard Wollheim, calls "commentary" becomes essential. One function of commentary is to set up an interpretive framework of questions and assertions that is often not explicit in fictional literature. But it also has an evaluative function. "I believe that we have made progress in understanding when we have set three opposed views of love and its knowledge beside one another . . . it is . . . philosophical criticism that has set up this confrontation, clarified the oppositions, moved us from an unarticulated sympathy with this or that story to a reflective grasp of our own sympathies."<sup>16</sup> In its simplest terms, commentary evaluates the truth or plausibility of the conceptions encountered in fiction. It evaluates whether represented consequences would be (are) actual consequences, whether a conception is internally coherent, whether it over-simplifies or distorts its object.

Hence the conceptions found in fictional literature (but not only there) have cognitive value not only in giving us new conceptions, in presenting them vividly to the imagination so that we get a real sense of what it is to accept them or live according to them, in giving us information about ourselves when we see how we react to them, but also in promoting the kind of commentary we have been speaking of—a philosophical or some other sort of investigation into their truth.

In the preceding discussion of the cognitive value of the conceptions presented in literature, I, like many others who have contributed to the discus-



sion of this issue, have concentrated on examples centering on issues about value and other broadly ethical issues. I feel somewhat guilty about this, because it at least gives the false impression that this is the main subject matter about which literature presents conceptions of cognitive significance. It obviously is an important subject matter, but hardly to the exclusion of many others that fall outside ethics. Conceptions concerning self-knowledge and our knowledge of others, the emotions, the springs of action, the nature of perception, of personal identity, of free will or determinism, of society, of time—to mention just a few additional common themes—equally abound.

It is often asked of the conceptions found in fiction, whether their turning out to be true adds to the value of the fiction in which it is found. It is perfectly reasonable to suppose that writers frequently aim at presenting conceptions that are true, and equally reasonable to attempt to evaluate such conceptions for truth. Such considerations might strongly tempt us to say that the truth of conceptions presented in literary works significantly adds to the cognitive value of those works. However, I have my doubts. It is interesting that this question is asked less often of works of philosophy than works of fiction (at least in my experience). Perhaps this is because we take it for granted that philosophical work is more valuable for asserting truths. But again, this is not so clear. We highly value works of philosophy (or criticism) that make “instructive” mistakes, which set out a position with great clarity and force (though it may ultimately be false), which amasses persuasive reasons to accept it (though they may ultimately be flawed), which foresees subtle objections and finds plausible replies (though they may ultimately fail). Such a work puts us in the best position to find out the truth, and that is more important than whether the position it defends is true. So it is with conceptions as they are presented in fictions. If they are rich and plausible enough to promote fruitful commentary (in Nussbaum’s sense), then they will be effective instruments to help us find the truth, and that is more important than whether they possess the truth. Thus, though conceptions of love and its knowledge that we find in Proust may turn out to be deeply flawed (if Nussbaum is right about them), in promoting this kind of commentary there is much to be learned from them.

It could still be insisted that truth, in itself, is still to be preferred to falsity, in itself. So a work that contains a truth on a certain topic is that much ahead in value of one containing a falsehood on the same topic. This can be admitted, while insisting that this is unlikely to be among the chief virtues of fictional literature. For such writing, it is far more important to help us along in our search for understanding about issues important to us than to express the truth.<sup>17</sup>

There is, however, one other factor to be taken into account before leaving this topic. It might be suggested that it is less common and less appropriate to take the kind of critical attitude that is standard in reading philosophy to the reading of literature. The latter, it might be said, requires a more sympathetic attitude, and this can best be maintained where we *believe* the work is pre-

senting us with insights (hence truths) rather than falsehoods. Further, if that belief is going to be cognitively efficacious it had better be true. Hence the truth of a conception found in literature not only adds to its value but does so in a very significant way.

I would resist this argument. I am uncertain that a sympathetic attitude is more appropriate to literature than a critical attitude, but even if this is true while reading a fictional work it needn't continue to be true when we begin the evaluative part of commentary. It is there that a critical attitude is essential, hence hardly inappropriate.

This completes the main exposition of my view of the cognitive value of literature.<sup>18</sup> Before closing, let us turn to a genuine alternative. According to Lamarque and Olsen,<sup>19</sup> literary value is not to be located in the usefulness or truth of the conceptions found in it about ourselves, our language, and our world. It is to be found in something internal to the works themselves. They nevertheless want to claim that this value is humanistic and cognitive. Their argument begins with the claim that literature is a social practice in which works are written, presented, and read for the sake of achieving a characteristic form of appreciation:

One central, characteristic purpose defined by the literary practice . . . is to develop in depth, through subject and form, a theme which is . . . central to human concerns and which can therefore be recognized as of more or less universal interest. Appreciation, and consequent evaluation of the individual literary work is a matter of eliciting and supporting the identification and development of a "perennial theme."<sup>20</sup>

Notice that the concern of appreciation and evaluation remains firmly *within* the work on this view. It is no part of the practice of literary evaluation to ask whether the conceptions developed with regard to some thematic material are useful in thinking about the actual world. Consider, with Lamarque and Olsen, Arnold Bennett's *Anna of the Five Towns*. This novel

organizes a described universe in such a way that the reader who applies concepts like "freedom of the will," "determinism" . . . in the appreciation of the work, will come to see how, in that universe, human beings are controlled by external forces. . . . There is no similar order in the real world that will make these concepts meaningful in this way. . . . [S]eeing life in terms of art is an optional extra that is only sometimes useful and mostly does not occur.<sup>21</sup>

For Lamarque and Olsen, the characteristic way of appreciating a literary work is to see, in detail, how one or more themes organize a fictional universe—the universe of the literary work. This clearly requires cognition—of the work in question. It has a humanistic aspect in so far as the theme is of "perennial" interest. However, the appreciative experience of the work that one achieves by this scrutiny is aesthetic in character, indeed is very similar to my characterization of the core aesthetic experience of literature. Lamarque

and Olsen would also so characterize it.<sup>22</sup> They admit that we can appreciate works because conceptions found in them are useful in thinking about the world, but they insist that this is not literary appreciation and does not indicate a literary value. It is no part of the practice of literary appreciation; it applies to some works but not others, "it is an optional extra . . . and mostly does not occur."

Is this an adequate conception of literary value—cognitive or otherwise? One problem with it, if the conception of art and its functions presented here is on the right track, is that it relies on a far too monolithic conception of the practice of literature and literary value. When one remembers that there are several different literary forms and many genres within each form, it becomes implausible that one simple model of literary practice or of literary appreciation is going to be adequate across the board. There are genres such as the realistic novel, not to mention its predecessors and successors, that were pursued with fairly explicit cognitive goals by its practitioners. It is not clear why those goals, assuming they can be rendered coherent, should not help define appropriate literary practice with respect to those genres. Again, within a practice as complex, variable, and necessarily sensitive to the individual creative works under scrutiny, it seems implausible to ignore individual aims of writers who often have cognitive ambitions beyond what Lamarque and Olsen allow as properly literary.

However, I also doubt that an adequate conception of a good literary work, in terms of thematic development, will be possible absent recognition of a cognitive dimension such as that offered here. As Lamarque and Olsen recognize, "perennial" themes can easily be found in all sorts of fiction that they refuse to call literary or to assign literary value: television soap operas, romance novels, perhaps even the fantasies of the *National Inquirer*. Thus it is not hard to see *Dynasty* (if I remember back aright) as presenting greed and the desire for domination as pervasive and powerful sources of human motivation that constantly interfere with the desire for satisfying personal relationships. This theme can be seen to organize every scene and every episode. It is not enough for a theme to be intricately interwoven with a subject for a work to possess significant value. As Lamarque and Olsen themselves say, what is needed are demands on our "intellectual, emotional, or moral nature. . . . For literature, like philosophy, challenges the reader to make his own construction, to . . . reach deeper insight into the great themes." Although they add "though this insight is 'literary,'"<sup>23</sup> I cannot see how judgments of value can avoid assessing the quality of thought expressed by a work's conceptions. This will typically take one beyond the work to the world. (Unlike Lamarque and Olsen, however, I would not claim that the artistic evaluation of a work should only or always center on the development of a work's theme.)

Finally, I suspect that emphasis on theme actually blinds Lamarque and Olsen to some of the more significant instances of cognitively valuable insight found in some of the works they discuss. Take *Anna of the Five Towns*: perhaps it has a "freedom of the will/determinism theme."<sup>24</sup> However, I doubt that it

would add much to the philosophical debate on that issue. Does that vindicate Lamarque and Olsen's view that one should concentrate on the way this theme is developed within the novel? Not at all. For quite apart from the question whether the characters of this novel ultimately have or lack free will in some strict sense, the novel forcefully illustrates a quite different point, namely, that there are social settings that are so narrow and inward-looking, the perceived options of those living within these settings are so reduced, that it matters little whether they in fact have free will (the ability to freely choose among options) or not. As *Anna* perhaps too clearly shows, in such settings violence and brutality may appear to be unexceptional behavior, and people willingly, and completely unnecessarily, sacrifice their happiness because they cannot conceive of an alternative. Perhaps I have identified another theme, but if so it is one about which *Anna* has something important to say that has, if anything, too straightforward an application beyond the novel.

The writing and reading of poems and plays, novels and short stories are no doubt part of a cultural practice. However, Lamarque and Olsen's account of the value of this practice is plausible only if it is a uniform practice, with a single dominant aim, that runs parallel to but only incidentally contributes to other cultural practices such as philosophy, and similarly only incidentally touches on the project of understanding the world or of the good or bad ways of living in it. Such a view, I would suggest, would make it impossible to provide a plausible account of the creative aims of Dante and Milton, Pope and Swift, Blake and Wordsworth, Balzac and Zola, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, Austen and Eliot, Keller and Stifter, Woolf and Lawrence, and so many others.

I turn now to some objections to the view that cognitive value is an important aspect of the artistic value of literature. Some argue that, in placing too much emphasis in a literary work's cognitive value, we make it more dispensable and replaceable than we take artworks to be. It may seem that once the cognitive value of a work is uncovered, we no longer need the work itself. We can, as it were, carry off the conceptions we have found in it, leaving the work behind. Furthermore, we might well find these conceptions elsewhere, in which case we would not need the work in the first place.

As an objection to thinking of the cognitive value of literary works as an important part of their value, these claims would be misplaced in several ways: first, even if such works were as dispensable and replaceable with respect to their cognitive value as this objection suggests, they might still be important for it. Things can be very worthwhile for doing an important job well even if other things do it also. But it is all too probable that, while replacements are possible, they are rare, unlikely, or less accessible than the work in question. Most important, however, the account of the cognitive value of fiction given here makes the objection less likely to hold at all. A good part of such cognitive value resides in the detailed and vivid way a conception is presented to the imagination, and this is not detachable from the work. (Notice that this source of a work's cognitive value is precisely the same as the source of a work's aesthetic value, namely, the contemplation of the detailed and vivid way a con-

ception is presented to the imagination.) Also, when works of fiction present conceptions on important matters, and do so in fascinating detail, it would be no more surprising if we return to these works and reevaluate the conceptions they present than that it is surprising that we return to philosophical works and reevaluate them.

A second objection goes back to Plato. A literary work might deal with any aspect of human experience or with any subject—metaphysical, psychological, or historical—of interest to human beings. What gives writers expertise on all, or any, of these matters? If the answer is *nothing*, as it appears to be, why should we suppose such works to have cognitive value?

If novels and poems were primarily offered up as reference works, or attempts to *establish* the truth of the conceptions found in them, this objection would be unanswerable. However, as our proposed conception of the cognitive value of literature emphasizes, such works do not typically have these cognitive functions. Literature's cognitive function resides in the intellectual benefits, discussed earlier, of presenting vivid and detailed conceptions to the imagination. This, of course, is just the kind of thing that writers are good at and hence their works are just where one would expect to go to receive these benefits. This is all that needs to be said to answer this objection, but there is one other thing that can be said: this is that many writers are unusually perceptive, have unusual insight into the issues that concern them. This is in part a consequence of the close attention that a writer must give to an issue and the subject matter used to explore that issue to do his or her job well. Perceptiveness and insight are not substitutes for good methodology in attempting to arrive at the truth, but neither can such a methodology stand in for perceptiveness and insight. Some people have these more than others, and when we encounter those that do, we should pay attention to them without supposing that they automatically offer up the truth.

A final objection to the cognitive significance of literature is that, when we paraphrase the conception found therein, those that might be serious candidates for truth usually turn out to be familiar truths about which we don't need literature to inform us. The answer to this objection is again twofold: first, it should be said that very often this is not true. The conception of lust found in Shakespeare's Sonnet 129 is not likely to be easily extracted from the man on the Clapham omnibus nor from more conventional condemnations found in religious texts. The same goes for the conception of human reason found in Swift. The conception of the law, with its endless interpretability, with its connections to religious practice and social regulation, to authority and bureaucracy, is unique to Kafka. Second, when one remembers that the cognitive function of literature, at least the one emphasized here, derives from the benefits of presenting conceptions to the imagination, then it can be seen that this can be worthwhile even with familiar truths. Such truths can state important or terrible facts about people's lives—such as those expressed in *Anna of the Five Towns*—which have to be brought home to us over and over again.

## NOTES



1. Robert Stecker, *Artworks: Definition, Meaning, Value* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), pp. 35–38.

2. For a more detailed summary of the tradition and its derivation from Kant, see Jerrold Levinson, “Aesthetic Pleasure,” in *Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. David Cooper (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 330–35. In the above characterization, Kant’s view that aesthetic experience or judgment is nonconceptual is omitted because it is too implausible to bear scrutiny.

3. For critiques of this traditional notion of aesthetic experience, see George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974); and Francis Sparshott, *The Theory of the Arts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982).

4. Kendall Walton, “How Marvelous: Toward a Theory of Aesthetic Value” (*Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51 [1993]: 499–510). He eventually qualifies this to the following: “pleasure taken is not just in an object . . . , but in an attitude one has toward an object . . . , the attitude being admiration or something else” (p. 508).

5. *Ibid.*, p. 505.

6. For references to recent attempts to state accounts of the traditional sort, see Stecker, *Artworks* (op. cit.), pp. 35–43. Another revisionary account is proposed in Susan Feagin, “Valuing the Artworld,” in *Institutions of Art: Reconsiderations of George Dickie’s Philosophy*, ed. Robert Yanal (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), pp. 51–69.

7. Levinson (“Aesthetic Pleasure,” op. cit.) suggests the following definition of aesthetic pleasure: pleasure derived from “apprehension of and reflection on an object’s individual character and content, both for itself and in relation to its structural base on which it rests.” The previous paragraph reflects the importance an object’s “structural base” *can* have in aesthetic experience. I am not convinced it *must* be attended to in such experiences.

8. For elaboration on this idea, see Hazard Adams and Robert Stecker, “Vacuous Singular Terms” (*Mind and Language* 9 [1994]: 387–401).

9. The remarks in this chapter about conceptions in fiction fall well short of being a theory about the nature of fiction. My hope is that they can be easily incorporated into an adequate theory.

10. Examples include Monroe Beardsley, “Philosophy and Literature,” in *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, ed. George Dickie et al. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1977), p. 328; and S. H. Olsen, *The End of Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

11. See Trilling’s Introduction to *Little Dorrit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953); and Olsen, *The End of Literary Theory* (op. cit.). Olsen fully understands the role of formal features in expressing a literary content (conceptions).

12. See Kendall Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 77–81, for a good discussion of this and related points.

13. David Glidden, “The Elusiveness of Moral Recognition and the Imaginary Place of Fiction” (*Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 16 [1991]: 125).

14. I am not attributing this oversimple view to Glidden, who I think is insightful in noticing the importance of imaginative projection in deliberation and its similarity

to a cognitive value of literary fiction. He does admit that "reasons enter in" (ibid.), but seems to want to resist that they do so in anything like the way they would in formal reasoning. He leaves unclear how they do.

15. See Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

16. Ibid., pp. 282–83.

17. I am indebted to Berys Gaut for helpful discussion on this topic.

18. The view is widely shared among many contemporary thinkers. For others who seem to me to share this view, see C. Wilson, "Literature and Knowledge" (*Philosophy* 58 [1983]: 489–96); R. W. Beardsmore, "Learning from a Novel," in *Philosophy and the Arts: Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures* (London: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 230–46; D. Z. Phillips, *Through a Darkening Glass* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982); Richard Eldridge, *On Moral Personhood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); David Novitz, *Knowledge, Fiction, and Imagination* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987); and Glidden, "The Elusiveness of Moral Recognition and the Imaginary Place of Fiction" (op. cit.), to mention a few of many others who could be cited. I am not claiming that the cognitive function of literature identified here is the only way literary works can have cognitive value or that these other ways have gone unnoticed. See Novitz (*Knowledge, Fiction, and Imagination*, op. cit.), pp. 119–20 for an excellent list of ways fictional literature can be cognitively valuable. See Peter Lamarque and Stein H. Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), for a detailed attempt to distinguish among and critically evaluate attempts to locate the cognitive value of literature in the truths and other conceptions it contains.

19. Lamarque and Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature*, op. cit.

20. Ibid., p. 450.

21. Ibid., pp. 454–55.

22. This is how Olsen repeatedly characterizes it in his earlier work (*The End of Literary Theory*, op. cit.).

23. Lamarque and Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature* (op. cit.), p. 455.

24. Ibid., p. 452.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# *The Experience of Music*



STEPHEN DAVIES

The composer and the performer have their own experiences of music. I ignore them, though, in order to concentrate on the person who hears music without having written or played it. More particularly, I will focus on the person who listens to music. She gives it her attention and does so because she hopes to find in it something to understand and appreciate.

To understand and appreciate the music, the listener must be suitably prepared for what she hears. Otherwise, she is not well-placed to hear the music in the noise it makes. In light of her recognition of its style, syntax, genre, instrumentation, and so on, she is able to follow the progress of the music. She is aware of where bits begin and end, of prominent melodies and motifs, of repeats, variations, and developments, of the waxing and waning of musical tension (whether tonal, harmonic, or rhythmic), and, where appropriate, of the music's expressive tone, its symbolic character, and its referential or quotational nature. She can sense what is likely to come next, what is normal and what unusual, when one major structural part has come to a close and another has begun, and when material is entirely new or related to what has gone before or repeated from a previous statement.

Such matters have been considered by philosophers—see Kivy (1990), Davies (1994a), and Levinson (1996c)—as well as by musicologists. And for an illuminating account of the phenomenological aspect of following music with understanding, see Levinson (1997). Rather than revisiting these familiar discussions, I will take them as having been read. In this chapter I develop my comments in a series of loosely connected sections. Some of my observations supplement and expand on matters that have been widely debated. A few introduce new topics not previously considered under the heading of the experience of music.



## DOES THE EXPERIENCE OF MUSIC CARRY WITH IT AN AWARENESS OF INEFFABLE TRUTHS?



The listener just described obviously brings to her experience of music a great deal of background knowledge. This is not to say that she requires formal training or an understanding of music theory and technicalities. The kind of knowledge that is relevant can be acquired over time by exposure to music in all its variety.<sup>1</sup> Because it is practical rather than bookish, the accomplished listener often cannot articulate what she knows, especially when asked to present this information systematically in abstract terms. Nevertheless, I doubt that the listener's comprehension could always be inexpressible. As implied above, she should be able to indicate that the melody begins here and ends there, that what is happening now is an exact repetition of what happened a few moments ago, that one passage is more energetic and happy than another that is sad and lethargic, and so on. Even if she does not share the specialized vocabulary of the musicologist, composer, or musician, the musically literate listener can describe what she hears in terms that reveal her as capable of following the music's progress.

Sometimes it is held that music conveys to the listener important truths that are special in not being expressible in language (for instance, see Langer [1942], Scruton [1997]). In other words, music is held to be a source of ineffable knowledge. I reject the extreme form of this view. The experience of music is ineffable in the way that all perceptual experiences, including those of the most mundane kind, are (Raffman 1993). There is a plenitude to perceptual experience that language does not capture. Indeed, language could not perform its central function of abstracting and summarizing how things are, or seem to be, if it did replicate all the abundance of experience. But there is no more reason to think that the rich texture presented by music to the senses somehow contains the meaning of the universe than there is to think the same about the indescribably complex and subtle play of sunlight on a leaf's surface. Music is infused with the human intellect that lies behind its creation and performance, admittedly, and is scented and spiced by the emotions expressed in it, undoubtedly, but it does not communicate deeply important truths about such things beyond what it wears on its face and can be described as showing. This is not to deny that music is important sometimes as a source of knowledge; instead, it is to deny that what is conveyed by music is indescribable or inexpressible.

Mendelssohn said that what is expressed by each musical work is unique to it. For the reason that it can be hard to put into words how the emotions expressed in different works are qualitatively distinct, this thought lies behind the view that music is ineffable in its expressiveness. My own view is that what is unique to the musical work is not, as just claimed, the emotion expressed, but rather, the means of expression. Music usually expresses rather general

emotions, and two different works can express the same quality of sadness. What is highly specific to each work is the detail of the means—the actual notes, harmonies, and so on—by which the emotion is expressed. These differences are describable and, therefore, are not ineffable. If we cannot put into words how the sadness of the slow movement of Beethoven's *Eroica* differs from the sadness of Chopin's funeral march, that is not because there is some subtle contrast that evades description. Instead, their sadness is of the same general character, with the relevant differences between the pieces lying not in what is expressed but in the musical means—means that are linguistically describable—by which this sadness is given its embodiments.

### CAN WE EXPERIENCE MUSIC AS THE COMPOSER'S CONTEMPORARIES DID?



Returning to the music lover described previously, notice that her listening is what I call “historically contextualized.” Musical genres, styles, and grammar change over time. To locate the piece that is the object of her attention, the music lover must hear the music in terms of the genre, style, and grammar that apply to it, which requires that her listening be informed by a familiarity with the musical ideals, goals, types, conventions, practices, instruments, and techniques presupposed by the composer as the musical heritage he shared with the performers and audiences he addressed. The sophisticated listener will also be aware of the composer's oeuvre, of influences on his development and thinking, and of music in the same genre written by others.

Yet, however much she tries to “contextualize” her listening, will not the experience of the modern music lover differ from that of the composer's contemporaries? For instance, a Baroque composer's contemporaries rightly believed they were hearing the latest music in the most avant-garde style, and they had no idea of what would follow in fifty or a hundred years. They were shocked by the discords they heard, startled by innovations in performance technique, impressed by the virtuosic demands made on the performers, and so on. When the present-day listener hears the same music, she believes that it is in an old style that was eclipsed by the Classical sensibilities of Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven. The discords are tame by comparison with what would follow, the instrumental techniques are all too familiar, and she is used to a much higher standard of virtuosity. Given that a person's beliefs affect what she perceives, these differences suggest that the present-day music lover cannot experience the music as the composer's contemporaries did.

I agree that there are bound to be discrepancies between the experiences of the two listeners. Some of these give an advantage to the music lover of the present time. She can assess the place of the given piece within a broader span of musical history, and thereby is better situated than the composer's contem-

poraries to weigh its significance. The important issue, though, is whether her modern beliefs prevent the present-day listener from experiencing the waxing and waning of musical tension, the music's melodic and tonal telos and closure, and so on. If she cannot, then what is alive, dynamic, and organic to the composer's contemporaries must be hollow, bloodless, and academic to her. A significant corollary is that the pursuit of "authentic" performance is without point if the present-day listener cannot experience such renditions as bringing the work to life.

Fortunately, however, the different beliefs of the listener from our own time need not prevent her from experiencing older music as full of movement, tension, expressiveness, and the like. So long as her listening is conditioned by expectations tailored to the music that is her focus, rather than to the most familiar types of her own age, she can experience it appropriately. And the majority of listeners do seem to be capable of making the relevant adjustments, as is apparent from the ease with which they move between styles, genres, and periods of music. Just as the jazz fan is not precluded from listening to rock with appreciation and enjoyment, so the listener of the present day is not debarred from hearing and experiencing the flux of energy within older varieties of music. When she does so, she puts her knowledge of the different "grammar" of later music "off line." While it is true, then, that the present-day listener will not experience the music exactly as the composer's contemporaries did, she is not thereby debarred from a full engagement with and deep appreciation of the music of the past.

### MUSIC IN THE MOMENT



As I have described it, is the listener's engagement with the music perceptual or cognitive? I would say "both," because perception usually is shot through with cognition. It is not as if we perceive an undifferentiated blur and, by a process of reasoning, work out that some things in the perceptual field are cats, others are chairs, and so on. Yet the question just asked is not without some bite, because it can be argued that our grasp of musical works in their totality must be purely cognitive, since it exceeds the compass of perceptual experience. This position is advocated by Jerrold Levinson (1997). What is most controversial about his view is the claim that the largest part of our enjoyment of music is "in the moment," whereas an awareness of large-scale form is unnecessary, intellectual, nonperceptual, and much less rewarding. Levinson calls his view "concatenationism." According to him, perceptual awareness extends over about one minute only, and the listener can follow the music with full understanding if she hears it on that scale while attending to connections to and implications for events shortly prior to and subsequent to that instant.

Yet, if *recognition* is in part perceptual and not wholly intellectual as seems obvious to me, it cannot be the case that the listener's awareness of large-scale musical structures is entirely nonperceptual, for that awareness comes out of recognizing of the present moment that some melody, idea, or section heard earlier in the work is being repeated, developed, alluded to, transformed, or whatever. In following the music, one can experience its form perceptually, I maintain. Levinson may be right, nonetheless, to insist that many listeners who follow the music adequately do not perceive or focus on its large-scale features, and hence that musicologists exaggerate in characterizing attention to such features as the very heart and soul of musical appreciation.

## PLEASURE AND THE EXPERIENCE OF MUSIC



Why do people listen to music? What do they get out of it? The answer seems obvious: pleasure. They do not listen as a matter of duty owed to others or as an exercise in self-discipline, but for pleasure taken in the music understood and appreciated for its own sake. Accordingly, the discussion of aesthetic pleasure (and how it differs from other species of pleasure) has occupied a central place within aesthetics and the philosophy of art (Levinson 1996a).

One common objection to this view is badly conceived. It maintains that we value music as an end in itself, for its own sake, and not merely as a means to other things. The conclusion drawn is that the person who seeks pleasure from music uses it as a mere means, and is not, therefore, a true music lover. The objection is misconceived, because it wrongly assumes that the pleasure taken in music somehow is separable from the process of following and appreciating that music. For instance, it wrongly thinks of the pleasure as a bodily sensation that could possibly be caused by things other than the music. The pleasure and the music are not separable in this way, however. The music is the unique means to the pleasure; the pleasure has to be described with reference to the music that is its object; the pleasure depends on an active perceptual and cognitive engagement with music recognized and appreciated in its particularity. The music is not merely a dispensable means to the pleasure, because the pleasure is not something that comes unbidden when one is exposed to the music, whether one notices it or not. It is bound up with an active involvement with the music and, as such, is *taken* in the music, not incidentally derived from it. (For discussion of this, see Davies [1994b]; Levinson [1996a, b]; and Stecker [1997].)

It is obvious, I have suggested, that we listen to music for the pleasure we derive from the experience it affords us. The number and variety of apparent counter-examples might give one pause, though. We listen to sad music, even knowing that we may be moved to feelings that are negative in mirroring what

is expressed in the music. Also, a fair amount of music turns out, when understood, to be banal and uninteresting—not a source of pleasure at all. (For that matter, not all music that is pleasing on a first encounter turns out to be enjoyable in the longer run.) Besides, a person might attend concerts of the latest avant-garde music though she accurately predicts she will not enjoy them. She goes, nonetheless, because she likes to keep abreast of the latest trends and developments.

Several lines of reply are available. We might sort the higher, cognitive levels of enjoyment from the lower, emotionally negative ones they encompass. We might hold that it is the anticipation of pleasure that draws us to music, even if that anticipation sometimes is thwarted; when it comes to choosing which music to listen to for a second or third time, it is the music that gave us pleasure formerly to which we are attracted. Or we might distinguish the pleasure taken in music as a whole from that taken (or not) in particular works. Or we might distinguish *aesthetic* pleasure from other pleasures that could be derived from art, and among aesthetic pleasure, we might sort *genuine* from immature, uninformed, or otherwise inferior varieties. As for the conscientious listener who subjects herself to music she predicts rightly that she will not enjoy, we might suggest that she is motivated by pleasure after all; that is, by the pleasure she takes in riding on music's cutting-edge, if not in the pieces as such.

There are people who argue that all human action is motivated by self-interest. Each apparent counter-example is met by an appeal to a more subtle or higher or longer-term self-interest, so that, for instance, the anonymous donor to charity is driven ultimately by his need to feel morally worthy, or superior, or whatever. In the end, the notion of self-interest becomes empty of explanatory power, because it turns out that the complete stranger who gives his life so that others can fill the lifeboats is as self-interested as another who tramples over women and children with no care except for saving himself. In the process, the concept of self-interest moves far from the moral notions of selfishness, callousness, hubris, and the other vices, with which it is initially associated. As a result, the claim that self-interest inevitably dominates no longer has the morally significant implications that seemed to lie behind its introduction.

Now, the idea that we are motivated by pleasure (when we are not driven by duty or self-discipline) is similar in being vulnerable to over-extension, with a corresponding dilution in its explanatory power. With a bit of ingenuity, we could respond to any counter-example by identifying some kind of pleasure, connected directly or indirectly to the music, lurking in the background. But the temptation to take the account in that direction should be resisted out of respect for what stands in need of explanation. For instance, it might be more honest and more convincing to allow that we can be motivated to listen to music for its own sake out of curiosity, or habit, or for many other reasons that pay no regard at all to a pleasurable payoff. In other words, there can be many reasons for acting other than the pursuit of pleasure. Even if my

trips to the dentist are self-motivated and self-regarding, it certainly does not follow that those visits must be a source of direct or indirect pleasure to me, or that they take pleasure as their goal.

Despite the caveats just registered, someone might reasonably maintain that, though pleasure is not always forthcoming when its pursuit is the main reason for listening to music, and though there may be many other reasons why a person would aim to understand and appreciate music, nevertheless the primary motivator for music lovers is the pursuit of pleasure. Some could be driven to listen to music by curiosity, or to pass the exams in their music-appreciation classes, or for the knowledge (of music, its history, its interpretation, instrumental technique, and so on) they obtain, and the experiences of all these people might be pleasure-free yet thoroughly satisfactory from their point of view, but in fact they would be in the minority. Fancy arguments aside, most music gives pleasure in being understood and appreciated, and if particular pieces do not, this is a reason for not seeking them out in the future. Most people enjoy and value music, importantly if not exclusively, for the pleasure it gives them.

It is surprising, then, when a philosopher argues that the pursuit of pleasure has little to do with our interest in appreciating music for its own sake. R. A. Sharpe (2000, 32–33) writes:

I go to many concerts. Do I enjoy them? Well, it is hard to say. Sometimes I am dissatisfied with the performance. . . . The occasions on which the music is brought to life are relatively few. . . . I am prepared to try [new music], even though I know the likelihood is that it will be incomprehensible or boring. I don't expect to like it, because I realize that only a tiny proportion of music is deeply moving and affecting. . . . The natural rejoinder from an advocate of pleasure as the end motive will be that I listen on the off-chance that it will give me pleasure. But when the chances are so remote, is that a reasonable account? The fact is that I love music, and I am very interested in it. Life without music would be, I am inclined to guess, very nearly intolerable. . . . The focus of my interest is the music. That is the object. I don't pursue it because of what I can get out of it; that would be a travesty. My interest in music is, in the proper sense, disinterested.

I have two brief, critical comments to make. Sharpe diagnoses the emphasis on pleasure as a “corrosive effect of utilitarianism” (2000, 37), but one does not have to agree with the utilitarian that pleasure is the only or ultimate value in order to acknowledge its importance in the experience of music. Pleasure can provide a very good reason for acting even if other reasons can be as powerful and even if some (such as the demands of justice) are overriding when they obtain. Second, Sharpe thinks that valuing music intrinsically excludes the possibility that we value it instrumentally, as a means to pleasure. But either it makes no sense to say we value it intrinsically (Stecker 1997, 251–58) or our valuing it intrinsically is compatible with its being valued as the unique source

of the pleasurable experiences that are inseparable from its appreciation (Davies 1994b).

My interest, though, is not in criticizing Sharpe's view but in teasing out the crucial insight it contains, which is that hedonic rewards are far too puny and one-dimensional to measure music's human significance. Sharpe says he *loves* music, and contrasts this with enjoying it. This brings to mind the image of a mother who, when accused of taking an interest in her child mainly for the pleasure she obtains as a result, replies that, to the contrary, she is devoted to the child because she loves it for its own sake. The music lover, in other words, is like any lover—not out for himself but devoted to the object of his passion, which may be frustrating or irritating as often as it is delightful.<sup>2</sup> And even if pleasure is taken in the object of love and also in the relationship of love, that hardly begins to account for the passion with which the object of love is desired, or for the way that the interests of the lover become absorbed and subsumed within a larger unit that encompasses his love's target.

Consuming love is an over-heated condition that is not sustainable in the long-term. To that extent, it is not an apt model for the relationship between the music lover and music. Nor is that of unrequited love, even if the music never reciprocates the listener's feelings. A better analogy is with the kind of love that sustains and fructifies an ongoing, developing relationship.

The relevant point is this: under the influence of love, the subject's sense of her own identity changes and expands, so that the relationship becomes focal to the subject's conception of herself as a being. For music lovers, music is *that* important. For them (if I may quote myself),

music is yet more than an important element in the fabric of life; it is integrated into their personal being and becomes part of what gives meaning and identity to their lives. Without music, the members of this group would no longer be the same individuals, for music shapes their conception of themselves no less importantly than do their relations with family, friends, lovers, and work. Listening to or performing music is for such a person a mode of existence and self-realization. (Davies 1994a, 276)

By now, I hope Sharpe's point is clear. To suggest that we listen to music for the pleasure we get from the experience is odd in the same way that saying we eat food for the pleasure we get from the experience is odd. Though this might be the reason given for eating a particular food on a particular occasion, and though the consumption of food is regularly pleasurable, the claim is peculiar because it so badly fails to understand that eating is a necessity, not something we choose to do for its instrumental value. It would be similarly strange to ask a person if she is the way she is because of the pleasure she gets from being like that. Even people who are comfortable with themselves are not the way they are for the enjoyment they take in being that way. If listening to music has become part of one's identity and self-hood, the suggestion that one listens for the sake of pleasure, even if often true, does not come near to indicating the role of music in one's life.

The claim that a love of music can contribute to one's sense of oneself as a person can easily be misunderstood as sensationalizing or over-dramatizing the place of music. Music's assuming this importance can come through a moment of transcendent revelation and transformation, or a kind of epiphany, as when one hears a particular work and feels that one's life and outlook cannot remain the same thereafter. More often, though, it occurs in the most everyday fashion, as repetition turns to habit. Music can creep up on a person just by being around all the time, and the same applies to a particular work if it is repeated often enough.

### PLAY IT SAM, PLAY IT AGAIN: REPETITION AND THE EXPERIENCE OF MUSIC



The repetition of musical works has not been much discussed, except in the context of trying to explain how an effect can be surprising the second time around.<sup>3</sup> This neglect may reflect the fact that, in Western classical music, it is not common to listen over and again to the same work.<sup>4</sup> There is something odd, then, in the behavior of Philip V of Spain, who employed the most famous singer of his time, the castrato Farinelli, to sing the same four songs every night for nine (some sources say ten, others say nearly fifteen) years.<sup>5</sup> Good classical works are supposed to be worth rehearing throughout a lifetime, but undue repetition over the short-term can be expected to kill the listener's appetite for the work. Nevertheless, not all groups of music listeners oppose frequently repeated hearings of a single piece. Devoted fans of pop sometimes will play the latest hit single ceaselessly for weeks at a time. In many folk traditions, particular songs have a long history of regular performance. The same is true also for parts of the musical repertoire of some non-Western cultures. The effect of repetition on the experience of music deserves closer attention, especially as repeated exposure to music can help make music central to the life and self-image of the individual.

Performers often spend hours with a piece, playing it over and over to learn and master it. Many girls in Bali begin dancing from about the age of four. Usually, the piece they are taught is *Legong Lasem*. Those who are good enough to perform publicly do so from about six years of age. My guess is that performers of *Legong Lasem* dance it about once each day for the best part of a decade. That surely is guaranteed to secure it a significant place in their lives! But I promised at the outset to concentrate on the listener, not the performer. In doing so, I will stay with the example just introduced, that of Balinese *legong*.

Many Balinese do not seem to tire of *Legong Lasem* and other pieces that are played very frequently. In times past, a number of princes bankrupted themselves through their obsessive devotion to *legong*. I can now see the source of this fascination, though it has taken some years for me to do so. I



had to learn how to follow the music and how the dance fits with it. I needed a working knowledge of techniques, themes, and symbols in Balinese dance in general, as well as of the specific stories and their stylized expression in individual dances. My appreciation was sharpened through watching lessons and rehearsals, and by becoming aware of subtle differences in the choreography and music that distinguish local variants.<sup>6</sup> And bit by bit, as if by osmosis, the dance and music came to occupy a place alongside other musical works that I love and cannot imagine living without.

Where is the interest in seeing *Legong Lasem* done again and again? For me it has two aspects: the first is a sense of satisfaction that comes from witnessing how a living performance tradition is continued, sustained, and extended. Though exceptional legong dancers can perform and teach to a great age, a gap of only three or four years separates each generation of dancers, so it is possible to see a group trained and groomed for public performance, appear for the first time before a tourist audience or in the temple, achieve maturity as performers, and close their careers or graduate to new dances, all within less than a decade. The second thing that holds my attention is the relentless passion for beautiful perfection that drives the whole enterprise. This is not to imply that there is some single, ideal performance to which all others aspire. Because the individual personalities of the dancers and musicians inevitably and quite properly emerge through their mutual interaction, what counts as perfection differs from group to group and time to time. So, the point is not that repetitions can be interesting, because each rendition holds out the possibility that, finally, the ideal might be realized. It is, rather, that repetition makes possible a perfection that varies from instance to instance, and that thereby facilitates the audience's focus on fine details of any rendition. Perfection in this dance is as complex and multidimensional as the facets of a cluster of crystals. It can be achieved often but never in a complete or exhaustive fashion, so each new performance offers the hope of adding something unique to a precious store.

### RECORDINGS, FUNCTIONAL LISTENING, AND IDIOSYNCRATIC PERSPECTIVES



One way music can be repeated and reheard is via recordings. Most of the music encountered by the listener (or hearer) is on disk, even if the work that is played was created and intended for live performance, as is so for most classical music (but not most rock music). To the extent that listening to a disk is not like hearing music played live, this means that much music is not experienced as it was intended to be. What would pass in a live performance as minor slips and as an excitingly original interpretation might be rightly perceived on a replayable disk recorded in a studio as unforgivable blunders and as an irritatingly eccentric interpretation (Davies 2001). Performers of and lis-

teners to classical music take account of the special conditions offered by the studio and of the comparative permanence of recordings in crafting and assessing recorded performances, which must therefore meet different, and sometimes higher, standards than are required in live performances. For instance, a recording probably should aim for a more intimate, painstakingly careful rendition than a live performance, which by contrast must be projected to its audience and must grab their attention from the beginning but need not sustain repeated hearings. Yet, even if the experiences of recordings and live performances differ in the ways just indicated, as well as in the obvious respect that one can usually see of what is involved in eliciting the music from the instruments at a live performance, it seems reasonable to acknowledge recordings as providing access to works intended for live performance, which is how we consider them in fact. The reasons for this are not difficult to discern: although the piece is not played in real time when it is recorded in the studio, we can know that the musicians who record it are capable of playing the same music live; although we do not see the instruments played as we listen to a recording, the experienced listener knows what she would see if she were present at the performance the recording simulates; and although the interpretation that works best on the disk would be less satisfactory in the concert hall and vice versa, both kinds of interpretation can be faithful to and consistent with the work.

This discussion of recordings brings another issue to mind: while we might often choose to listen to music, we are also likely to hear a great deal of (broadcast) music that has the function of creating an appropriate ambience. The experience of this music can be subliminal; it creates a complementary background mood to whatever is the main idea, event, or activity. At other times, music is very conspicuous in performing its functional role. For instance, thunderous, noble fanfares herald the king's arrival, or the congregation joins together in singing a prayer or hymn. Even when it is prominent, music often serves to accompany some other idea, event, or activity and as such is functional. It is to be danced to, or to be married to, or to be buried to.

Philosophers of music tend to focus on music that has been designed to be appreciated for its own sake. This is understandable, I think, but it would be foolish to overlook the extent to which music functions as a handmaiden to other activities. Acknowledging its functionality does not entail undervaluing its importance to us. The reverse is true. It is precisely because music can stir the passions, can focus our attention, can quicken our responses so that we want to sing or dance along, and can generate a sense of involvement and community as well as of occasion that it is resorted to so often. It is not as if it is a happy coincidence that music is playing in the background when presidents are inaugurated, or men march to war, or when celebration is called for. Rather, its power to heighten the significance of any occasion is accepted and confirmed whenever music is harnessed to the promotion of some functional purpose. Accordingly, a crucial aspect of the experience of music often will involve a sense of its contributing to a wider social event.

The potency of music not only suits it for exploitation in the public arena, as just described, but also for a comparable, perhaps idiosyncratic use in the private sphere. For instance, a ballad playing when we met becomes “our song.” It becomes emblematic of our relationship not merely by its contiguity and association with it but also because it exemplifies features pertinent to or possessed by that relationship; it is serious but warm, tender but firm, and so on. Philosophers do not normally discuss that which is personal in the listener’s experience of music (for an exception, see Higgins [1997]). This is because they are interested in what is intersubjective and thereby generalizable or even universalizable about our connection to music. This is as it should be. The very personal interest and value that music can have for us is significant more as autobiography than as philosophy. But from the inside, writing as a listener rather than as a philosopher, that inescapably intimate dimension to the individual’s experience of music is usually as or more important than the rest.

## NOTES



1. Most people probably underestimate the extent to which music pervades their environment, or the quantity of information that can be gathered and stored by the very young. Children seem to pick up their culture’s tonal system with the same natural facility as they show in learning a language, and first show a practical grasp of both at much the same age.

2. Many families are such that, while bonds of love and history link them together, their members might wonder what that tie is supposed to have to do with pleasure.

3. This has been viewed as a problem for information-theoretic approaches to musical significance; see Leonard Meyer, “On Rehearing Music” (*Journal of the American Musicological Society* 14 [1961]: 257–67).

4. And in music improvised or performed live it was not possible to rehear what was played until the invention of recording devices. Lee B. Brown has argued that because they can be replayed, recordings of jazz kill what they capture; see “Phonography, Repetition, and Spontaneity” (*Philosophy and Literature* 24, no. 1 [April 2000]: 111–25).

5. For Philip, the songs were therapy for his pathological depression.

6. It is possible to see *Legong Lasem* every night in tourists shows, with performances by six or more different troupes. When presented for tourists, the piece is abridged to half its full length, but even then runs to about twenty minutes.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# Cognitivism and the Experience of Dance



GRAHAM MCFEE

## INTRODUCTION



It might be argued that many texts in aesthetics, and specifically my *Understanding Dance* (McFee 1992a: cited as *UD*), focus on the cognitive properties of artworks (in my case, dance works) at the expense of the experiential properties of those works. This criticism has some justice; but a fuller answer to it should begin by explaining that such an emphasis on the cognitive is warranted partly by the more general and misleading emphasis on the experiencing of artworks. For what is distinctive of artworks (if one had to choose just one thing) is their invocation of artistic concepts; that is to say, to take an artistic interest in a particular object is to regard it under a certain battery of concepts (and to be right so to do, when it is an artwork), thereby introducing the artistic/aesthetic contrast. Since this feature is widely ignored or missed, it makes sense to emphasize it. And doing so will work against the sort of overemphasis on the sensuous to which, say, Arthur Danto was responding when he stressed, as two features characteristic of artworks, their aboutness<sup>1</sup> and their embodiment.<sup>2</sup> But, as we shall see, this stress does not preclude giving due weight to the sensuous properties of artworks. For, as Peter Kivy<sup>3</sup> once put the point: “To describe something in artistic terms is to describe it; but it is to savor it at the same time: to run it over your tongue and lick your lips; to investigate its pleasurable possibilities.”

Since attention to the cognitive was never intended (at least in my writing)

to preclude giving such due weight to the sensuous, it is important, before coming to the case of dance, to plot some of the contours of both the cognitive dimensions of art and its affective dimension, viewed quite generally. So we will highlight experiential elements both within the cognitive capacities and implicit in (some) artistic properties. We will also recognize the importance of the experiential aspect of artistic meaning.

Part of my thesis here is precisely that (for philosophical aesthetics) nothing can usefully be said about the nature of dance experience as such. Rather, we must learn, first, to characterize artistic properties, and especially artistic meaning, by recognizing their embodiment (hence, their essential sensuousness); and second, to recognize differences in concepts (and powers and capacities) that ground the claims to different experiences.

## ART AND ARTISTIC EXPERIENCE



### *Artistic/Aesthetic*

Our appreciation, judgment (etc.) of artworks differ in important ways from our appreciation, judgment (etc.) of all the other things in which we take an aesthetic interest, even though both might be characterized in terms of a concern with grace, line, and so on, or their opposites. That is, I begin from an artistic/aesthetic distinction.<sup>4</sup> And, while acknowledging the Ithaca, New York aesthetic side of this contrast,<sup>5</sup> our interest here lies in artistic appreciation, artistic judgment, and so on.

Asked to motivate this contrast between artistic and aesthetic, I would (first) point to the difference in our interest in the great painting and in the wallpaper on the wall on which it hangs, that we value each (in a nonmonetary way) but that we do so differently; we would not, say, confuse one with the other without misleading ourselves. Then (second), having made out the distinction for one artform, I would urge it quite generally. Thus the grace of the road-sweeper (or the gymnast) should be contrasted with that of the dancer: to this degree at least, art-status should be seen as transfigurational.<sup>6</sup> Further, I would indicate how artistic appreciation, artistic judgment (etc.) locate the artwork in question in the history and traditions of art-making and art-appreciating in the artform (and, perhaps, that genre, etc.). So that a failure to know or understand counts against one's possibilities of making (genuine) artistic judgments—that is, judgments true of the artworks before one.

One corollary of the artistic/aesthetic contrast is that one's calling a painting, say, gaudy will amount to something different when one recognizes that the painting is an artwork from what it amounted to when one mistook the gaudy object for, say, wallpaper. The key case here, of course, concerns the term "beauty": if I (mis)take something for an artwork and find it beautiful, my now coming to recognize that it is not an artwork will not leave that judgment unaffected; rather, it will affect the judgment "not by raising or lowering

that judgment, but by knocking it sideways" (Wollheim 1993, 174). Even if I continue to regard the object as beautiful, its beauty will amount to something different. So one cannot just say, "Well, OK, it is not art but I still find it beautiful"; for what one meant by the term "beauty" is implicated, hence the "still" ("I still find it beautiful") is unjustified!

A second corollary of the artistic/aesthetic contrast is that taking an artwork for a (merely) aesthetic object is mistaking it, misperceiving it. Our classic cases of such misperception are, first, the birdsong mistaken for music, perhaps as a result of listening to a surfeit of Messiaen, where a proper object of aesthetic interest ("aesthetic object" for short) is misperceived as art: we take such objects to have a structure they could not have, as though a crack in a wall seemed to spell a loved one's name. It not only did not do so; it could not do so. In our second case, the Messiaen is misperceived as birdsong (artwork taken for aesthetic object). Misperception of this second kind would beset those ignorant of the conventions of that artform, just as David Best (1978, 115; 1992, 171), although knowing nothing of Indian dance, is entranced by the quality of movement in Ram Gopal's dance while recognizing that he is unable to treat it as art. We should also mention the misperception implicit in taking the atonal music for discordant tonal music, the Cubist painting for a poorly executed one in another style: what such failures to employ the appropriate category of art (Walton 1978) in one's perception illustrate, of course, is a kind of failure of artistic appreciation not readily shared with aesthetic appreciation.

A third corollary grows from these two: that artworks have a value, of a nonmonetary kind, not (in principle) sharable with (mere) aesthetic objects. This kind of value is not easy to characterize, of course, but, as a first shot, we might talk of the kind of meaning appropriate to artworks. To see the object (say, the dance) as an art-object (not a [mere] aesthetic object) just is to ascribe this sort of meaning.

To be clear: my aim here is not to limit the realm of what is (or could be) art, much less to impose some narrow limit on it (see Korsmeyer 1977; Shusterman 1992, 18–21). But I am urging that someone who argues that such-and-such is art is thereby committed to find such-and-such valuable in ways typical of art<sup>7</sup>—that is why the person insists on the term "art"! And thereby commits to contrasting the (appropriate) perception of such-and-such as art with the misperception of it as merely aesthetic—that is, as being graceful and so on (or its opposites), but only in the manner of the wallpaper in our earlier example, not of the painting.

Further, an object or practice might be mistaken for art; its grace and other attributes might lead someone to take it for art, but be wrong so to do, although, in any particular case, whether or not this were so might be at best arguable. Yet it wouldn't be for, say, American Indian ghost dances, if the description of them I quote elsewhere (*UD*, 286) were correct; namely, as having "the very specific purpose of restoring lost lands and traditions" (Spencer 1985, 2). For, whatever the purpose of dance, it is not this! So accepting this

characterization of the ghost dances is accepting the (negative) conclusion that these are not artworks. Hence, someone urging that these were indeed artworks must be contesting some aspects of that description.

### *Transfiguration and Art*

That artworks (such as dances) can be misperceived either as merely aesthetic or in an inappropriate category identifies a quite general constraint here: for, in treating the artworks (in virtue of being artworks) as amenable to kinds of misunderstanding, it recognizes them as objects of understanding. As we saw, Danto characterizes this feature by speaking of the aboutness of artworks.

What we take from Danto here includes the transformative effect of art-status: that the artwork acquires artistic properties and this distinguishes it from its “nonart” cousins. In a similar way, a graceful action might simply be my walking, or part of my gymnastic floorwork, or part of my dance: but these are not equivalent actions—that it is dance (when it is) that transforms, or transfigures, that action.

So the thought is that an object’s being an artwork necessarily plays a role in our appreciation of it making a difference, because art-status permits us to see the object (especially when a physical object, such as a painting) as embodying meaning, an idea that only makes sense for artworks (not for the [merely] aesthetic). Moreover, when (say) the action of the road-sweeper is transfigured, there is a clear sense in which it is changed a set of properties is acquired, and a sense in which it is not; the patterns of muscular movement, say, might be the same. And this tells us something about the nature of the new properties, by stressing their connection to the audience for them. Generally, to say that a movement pattern becomes transfigured into a part of a dance is to say that we can (and should) now see the movement pattern that way, just as the transfiguration of sounds into music (the creation of tones, rather than mere sounds [Scruton 1997, 8]) means that they are heard differently, and this is what their being different consists in!

This idea could be elaborated on by reference to Danto’s “gallery of indiscernibles.” Here, objects indistinguishable to (say) visual inspection (we could not tell their photographs apart, say) might be a number of different things. Some elements from the catalogue, all of which are comprised of a canvas with a painted square of red pigment, are: (a) a minimalist exemplar of geometrical art (entitled) “Red Square” (Danto 1981, 1); (b) a still life executed by an embittered disciple of Matisse, called “Red Table Cloth” (Danto 1981, 1); (c) a canvas grounded in red lead, upon which, had he lived to execute it, Giorgione would have painted his unrealized masterpiece “Conversazione Sacra” (Danto 1981, 1) (here, I imagine, the preparation was done by workers in the studio; this would have become an artwork, although presently it is not); and (d) “a surface painted in red lead” (Danto 1981, 1) (although Danto does not explain this, I imagine its being a kind of window blind, the red pigment being especially suitable in a certain climate. As with (c), Danto would call this a

“real thing”; we can adopt this terminology). And, of course, any of these objects (“real” or artwork) might be mistaken for any other (“real” or artwork).

As we have seen, these are different: different things can (truly) be said of each, and one can misperceive any of them by (mis-)taking it for another one, or treating one as though it were another (if these are different modes of misperception). Now, since these cases are different, it follows both that we should be wary of treating them in the same way, and that at least some cases of treating them in the same way will involve misperception.

Further, the “transfiguration” into artwork is important just because it brings with it a critical vocabulary of the kind appropriate to art, the kind of artistic valuing from which we began! For that is precisely what the artworks (a and b) both have, and the “real things” lack. Moreover, this is a clear way of articulating one way artworks differ—a different critical vocabulary is appropriate to each—since each has a place in a different “narrative” of art history or in a different tradition; what we have characterized as a different category of art applies to each. And a different critical discourse follows.

At least in some moods, Danto seems to say that sensuous properties (as I am calling them) are artistically irrelevant, since two objects indistinguishable in purely sensuous terms might still be, say, one artwork and one “real thing.” Hence “the eye is of no value whatever in distinguishing art from non-art” (Danto 1994, 7). But his difficulty arises from, first, an unduly empiricist version of what counts as a sensuous property, and, second, a commitment to the sort of essentialism that seeks necessary and sufficient conditions for (in this case) art-hood. But the properties of artworks, although transfigured, do not fail to be sensuous merely by being crucially the properties of artworks. Indeed, this is my point about the “equivocal” character of such properties. Rather, the artistic/aesthetic contrast must work against a crude view of sensuousness by emphasizing the cognitive dimension in (even) some aesthetic appreciations.<sup>8</sup> In fact, even (for instance) seeing red might be thought of in conceptual terms; then (some) failures of perception here might be explained in terms of the lacking of the cognitive stock.

### *The Cognitive Dimension: “Mobilizing in One’s Experience”*

However, this point can be over-stressed. For instance, discussion of the nature of criticism can be conducted in terms of the cognitive stock appropriate for criticism; that is, the critic’s powers are treated (exclusively?) in terms of what he or she knows. This procedure is, of course, warranted by the fact that the charge of misperception can be sustained by pointing to the employment, in the perception, of inappropriate concepts. Yet that does not do enough to characterize what can go wrong, and even less so what can go right, when critics confront artworks. For example, if the perceptiveness of any perceptive critic of art were just a matter of the cognitive stock (of what the critic knew), the distance between him or her and us would become remediable, at least in principle; we could all acquire that cognitive stock, and with it that critical perceptiveness. That this is obviously not true should make us hesitate here.



So however revealing this talk can be, it leaves out something crucial. In this vein, Wollheim (1986, 48) speaks of “the concepts the spectator has and mobilizes”; hence a crucial additional idea is of mobilizing concepts in one’s experience. The phenomenon referred to (the need identified) is familiar, I imagine, to anyone who has been taught a critical vocabulary for poetry but, at first, cannot see that this vocabulary informs the understanding of the poem, and then, quite suddenly, it does; the person can now mobilize those concepts in the appreciation of the poem. But talk of artistic appreciation requiring that artistic concepts be “mobilized in one’s experience” employs the term of art as another way of stating the problem (or a part of the problem) about expressiveness. For the work must be found expressive, by me, on the basis of my observation (etc.). So the expressiveness of (for example) the painting depends (minimally) on the possibility of creatures who can respond to it, finding it expressive.

Identifying the requirement for mobilization, then, basically explains why there might be misfires here; and even then, it really says no more than that the person cannot bring the concepts to bear—it does nothing to explain why this should be. To put that the other way around, the contributions of cognitive stock and mobilizing in one’s experience as differential explanations fail to make sense of artworks: “He lacks the requisite cognitive stock”; “She has the concepts, but cannot mobilize them in her experience.” More exactly, these are diagnoses of relevance to aesthetic education: “He needs to learn more about” (and then some filling about cognitive stock—locating the work in its appropriate tradition, for example); “She needs to be helped to see these artworks in ways we know she can see others,” say roughly as someone unable to see one aspect of a multiple figure might be helped.<sup>9</sup>

### *Nature of (Some) Artistic Properties*

In stressing the transfigured status of artistic properties, I have emphasized a transformation of what we see when we look at a certain scene; to use an example from Ian Ground,<sup>10</sup> when the flared jeans one had admired cease (for you) to look “cool.” Changes at the level of artistic understanding are, to some degree at least, similar changes of experience. The idea that I come to see the work differently should be taken literally, and contrasted with cases where, although I know more about the work, this has no bearing on my appreciation (my experience) of that work. Then, I know more about the work, without that altering my artistic judgment (even in a small way). And this is precisely to reiterate our earlier remark about the need to mobilize one’s concepts (what one knows) in one’s appreciation of the work. For, without some such impact, the knowledge does not contribute to my understanding of the work as art: for I cannot see how the outcome of that knowledge is embodied in the work.

Of course, it may be difficult to identify (for example, in a third-person way) such changes in understanding: when am I really seeing something different as opposed to, say, noting something different about it, perhaps for an audience with different concerns or interests? And it may be impossible for me

to describe to someone: I just keep repeating my account of this work and insisting that it is different from how I saw it before. Now, the differences may be obvious (say, in what I compare it to or say it is like). But equally they may not.<sup>11</sup> Still, what this stresses is the experiential dimension of such qualities.

Since the experience of art (especially dance) is at issue, secondary qualities such as color suggest one useful comparison; recognizing that artistic properties, like secondary qualities, are essentially experienced. This relates, of course, to the potentiality for such experience, not its actuality. So, generally, no red beyond the possibility of experience. And the same is true of artistic properties; as Scruton (1997, 217)<sup>12</sup> puts it: “[m]usical understanding is inseparable from the experience of music; so much, at least, is obvious.” And, again, as with musical properties: “[c]olor belongs exclusively to the realm of appearances: but there are objective facts about color, and things really are colored” (1997, 222).

For there is nothing to an object’s being colored other than some (complex) relation concerning its appearing colored (hence Scruton’s talk of a “realm of appearances”). As McDowell (1998, 134) explains the context for our understanding of redness: “An experience of something as red can count as a case of being presented with a property that is there anyway, there independently of the experience itself.” Yet we recognize the relation of that property to human powers and capacities, and even to human concerns. For, as McDowell (1998, 112) notes, “[a]esthetic experience typically presents itself as a confrontation with a value”: both secondary qualities and artistic value are seen or recognized; and such recognition is central to there being either.<sup>13</sup>

As Thomas Reid points out, the kind of common sense reflected in ordinary language does take, say, the colors of objects to be features of those objects; and the same goes for artistic values: “To say that there is in reality no beauty in those objects in which all men perceive beauty is to attribute to man fallacious senses” (Reid 1969, 783). Reid’s thought is that there is only one possible basis for making that attribution (namely, a perceptual one) and hence only one possible basis for disputing such attribution; and that this cannot be a sufficient basis, for either it simply grants the fallaciousness of the senses in that case (but not in others) or it becomes a general (skeptical) thesis. So, rather than being a difficulty to be met here, this aspect of both color properties and value properties just seems a fact to be acknowledged. There are really three points:

- The basis for ascription of beauty (and other things; beauty is just an example) here is the only basis there could be; this is the only basis on which such properties might be ascribed “for one’s self.” So the person who urges that this object is, say, beautiful speaks truly unless he or she has made a mistake! So there are in principle favored, “no-mistake” cases with which the others are implicitly contrasted.
- The denial that there is a way for the claim about beauty to be false other than simply by its being not true,<sup>14</sup> so that, say, these objects

lack beauty although others do not, and then the point above generates the “reality” of, for instance, beauty as a perceptible property. (The counterview is that this is not the sort of thing that could be true of, say, physical objects or human actions, which would be a kind of error theory.)<sup>15</sup>

- For Reid, general (skeptical) worries about either perception in general or the perception of properties of this sort are incompatible with God’s goodness; in our more secular age, we might think of it as being incompatible with either our “direct realist” account of perception<sup>16</sup> or our view of the nature of such properties/qualities.

So, to repeat, rather than being a difficulty to be met here, the experience-dependence of both color properties and value properties just seems a fact to be acknowledged. And that, in turn, points to a powerful quality within such properties. Thus, as Reid (1969, 754) notes: “This excellence [of an air in music] is not in me; it is in the music. But the pleasure it gives is not in the music; it is in me.” For clearly the property (or whatever) that we ascribe requires both the characteristics of the object and the powers and capacities of the audience. The correct way to characterize the issue, therefore, is as concerning the nature of such properties. And notice how such properties, applied to artworks such as dances, guarantee their own audience, for without the audience we might reasonably claim no property!

Not that artistic judgment is exactly like the recognition of secondary qualities.<sup>17</sup> As Scruton (1997, 377–78) notes, “[y]ou do not ‘see’ that a work of art is sad, sentimental, or sincere unless you understand it. No understanding is required to see that a picture is red.” Scruton is not, of course, disputing that a certain conceptual mastery is required to see that a picture (or even a painted surface) is red, but despite the cognitive element this implies, it does not require (further) understanding, and in particular, not understanding of this object. Notice that Scruton is not here denying that one “sees” (I take the scare quotes to highlight the variety of perceptual modality) that the work of art is sad or otherwise, that these are features of the work of art, and that our (perceptual) interaction with the world (our being “perceptually sensitive to features of [our] environment” [McDowell 1994, 50]) gives us access to them. Indeed, this thought is fundamental to the artistic/aesthetic contrast: that artistic properties of artworks are genuine features or properties of those works, even if they require an audience for their recognition (or existence) as secondary qualities do!

### *“Paraphrase” and Completeness*

But in Danto’s work—for instance, in his gallery of indiscernibles (discussed earlier)—it is effectively denied that the physical properties of a particular artwork need be unique to it; rather, the same red square of pigment on a canvas could amount to any of a number of objects—some artworks, others not. Yet Danto is here trying to “break the hold” of a certain misconcep-

tion of the role of perceptually immediate properties: they are not all that make an object either the artwork that it is (rather than some other) or an artwork at all!

For this reason, we should recognize the feature Danto was (correctly) identifying: that the meaning of the artwork must be (uniquely)<sup>18</sup> instantiated in the work itself, rather than completely expressible in terms detached from the work. In the dance example, only dance, and only this dance, offers me this (precise) insight. So one cannot (even) say what I have learned. For, if I could, I would (therefore) be able to “express” the insight detached from the dance itself (especially from the sensuous properties of the dance). But then those sensuous properties would seem irrelevant. No, what I learn is not (completely) expressible in some other form. And this is what his stress on the (necessary) embodiment of artistic aboutness is designed to secure. Of course, this feature can be overstated: the content of very many artworks might be expressible as, say, “man’s inhumanity to man,” clearly suitable for Picasso’s *Guernica* but equally for Wilfred Owen’s poem, “*Dulce et decorum est.*” Still, these works are not equivalent—nor could they be correctly taken to be. So their “aboutness” will be distinguishable, and in just the ways Danto-esque talk of “essential embodiment” sustains.

The point about sensuousness is sometimes put by saying that all that an artwork means or says cannot be expressed in another way, neither in another artwork nor in a nonart fashion, or that it cannot be paraphrased without remainder. The thought here is a good one and need not mislead. But the expression is not helpful, as it may suggest a finite totality of meaning or “aboutness” here, an “all” that could be reached (in principle). Yet we are not committed to that idea (see McFee 2000, 122–23). Rather, the conception of the contextualism of meaning employed here works against any such assumption, for there seems to be no obvious finite totality of contexts.

Moreover, the conclusion that artworks are not in this way “paraphrasable” is not an empirical discovery about them, based on considering lots of cases and trying hard to render them into another form, either art or nonart. Instead, it reflects a commitment on our part, an element of the conception of art at work here. For, if two art-objects (say) did have completely the same meaning, such that we could say correctly, “If you cannot get one, get the other, they amount to exactly the same thing,”<sup>19</sup> that would offer us a basis for regarding these as instantiations of one artwork rather than as separable works. And our argument for this conclusion could begin from reflection on authorship: if the first work is by Smith, and she has embodied the relevant “aboutness,” the second work (by Jones) will simply be a copy of Smith’s, or another instantiation of it, if that second work is (otherwise) indistinguishable (for artistic purposes) from the first.<sup>20</sup> And, of course, we precisely do treat in this way works with obvious relations one with another; thus aspects of Picasso’s painting “inspire” Wallace Stevens to write his poem, “The Man with the Blue Guitar,” which in turn prompts a David Hockney volume of illustrations. But the Stevens and Hockney are clearly different works of art, amount-

ing to something different, and that is guaranteed by their being different embodiments. Yet, in turn, it guarantees a different “aboutness” (or meaning) for each.

In fact, although the requirements for embodiment and “aboutness” seem like the articulation of two positive conditions to be met by any putative artwork, they are more revealingly viewed as negative conditions, two ways of explaining failures of artistic endeavor (or properties of nonart objects): such-and-such report is not an artwork because, although it is certainly about something (namely, the road accident), that aboutness is not embodied in the object. And we see this by recognizing that changes in the object would not change that aboutness and that this is no flaw in the object, whereas finding that the embodiment of an art-object could be changed without its “aboutness” changing would typically be identifying a flaw in it.<sup>21</sup> Equally, a display of road-sweeping (or an Olympic ice-dance performance)<sup>22</sup> would consist of something—it would be embodied, in that sense. But we could not see it embodying meaning: it necessarily lacks “aboutness” and hence is not an artwork. Thus sensuousness (and hence embodiment) as a feature of artistic meaning: (a) picks up a similarity to and a difference from (mere) aesthetic judgment, one often invoked as a characteristic of the (wider [UD, 39–42]) aesthetic, and (b) seems crucial to the kind of facts that some artistic facts (like others—for instance, color facts) are!

This second concern picks up a further element of our relation to sensuousness: the response-reliance of artistic facts (discussed above). It also averts to a third interest, one which, in introducing a sensuous dimension, makes this position not a pure cognitivist one: the need to mobilize (in one’s experience of any artwork) the appropriate concepts and categories. And this, too, we have seen is best treated as a negative condition as a way of explaining failures.

## DANCE EXPERIENCE



### *Recapitulation*

There are three main points to be gathered here, from this sketch of considerations from our (cognitivist) account of artistic judgment:

- a. The role (for philosophical aesthetics) of experiential dimensions of artworks to provide the contribution of what (as we have seen) Danto calls “embodiment”; that is, to see the meaning of artworks as essentially having a sensuous quality.
- b. The experience of art as the recognition of qualities/properties—for example, in speaking of the “brilliant integration of virtuosity, drama, and spectacle”<sup>23</sup> in *Giselle* and going on to identify how it is achieved/manifested. Of course, this “realism” about artistic features is not

strictly required, but it fits naturally with the picture; at the least, on this view, the properties in question are clearly “of the object.”

- c. For the study of this experience we could do worse than look at the concepts that are to be mobilized in (appropriate) experience of the works; that is, those mobilized in artistic appreciation.

Two further features are also of relevance here and can be presented succinctly to lead us forward:

- d. Our concern here is not the issue of the experience of dancers; indeed, how relevant could the experiences of dancers be to what makes dance works art? In part, the issue is one that David Best (1974, 142) identifies: that dancers (like musicians), when in that role, have a favored perspective only on their own bit of the performance, rather than on all of it. Further, the performance will typically be conceived from the spectators’ viewpoint, proscenium arch or not!
- e. Neither is it an issue of empathy or something else. Demonstrating this, however, is our next task.

### *A Distinctiveness to Dance Experience?*

It might seem that dance offers something special here, since the bodily movements of dancers share qualities with bodily movements of others—in particular, of the audience. And it can seem self-evident that such bodily movement can be expressive and so on. So the general experiences of the audience might seem to offer some specific insight for dance.

But this is mistaken, primarily in failing to do justice to the transformative power of dance-status, in three ways: first, there is nothing in the recognition of artistic meaning that requires this kind of “shared-ness”: the expressiveness of (say) painting and hence the experience of painting (as art) is not similarly dependent on shared properties. Then, second, a mistaken view of communication operates here (see *UD*, 243–44). For the idea of communication is (essentially) related to that of meaning, as when my boss learns from my yawning that I am bored by/at the meeting, the very last thing I’d hoped for! There is no (genuine) communication here, and no meaning, just because my behavior lacks both the required kind of intention and (therefore?) anything specific to communicate. These fit together; there cannot be anything to communicate (since nothing was intended), and the lack of intention implies that there is no “message” to be communicated (or to fail to be communicated, or to misfire in communication, and so on). For it makes no sense to think of some asserting with absolutely no communicative intention.<sup>24</sup>

However, these represent two kinds of misfires. For something might be learned that, while not real or genuine communication (Best 1978, 40; *UD*, 244), is nevertheless there (I really *am* bored at the meeting and my boss finds

out); equally, what is intended may not be realized (I mean to make a dance masterpiece, but . . .). So (a) determining what is intended and what is communicated amounts to one determination, and (b) the recognition of failures of artistic achievement might be localized (for particular artworks in particular contexts) as amounting to either failures of intention or failures of communication; thus as explicable in terms of this contrast. So “communication” in, say, the yawning case is not genuine communication, since it lacks the intention to communicate (present in, say, “hand-languages”), and such “communication” lacks the sort of expressiveness appropriate for art/dance. Or, to put that the other way, the meaning of dance works is not (just) the meaning of movements. Moreover, and third, the idea of some specific modality here, such as the kinaesthetic sense (*UD*, 264–73) also cannot account for the genuine artistic experience of dance works. Our access to them, as appreciators or experiencers of them, is via the projective sensory modalities (sight, hearing) (*UD*, 266).

As one way to bring out the issue, ask where the experience of dance is located. In the muscles, joints, or somewhere else? No, but for reasons of two different kinds: that this is mistaken as an account of the experience of movement (Anscombe 1981, 71; and compare Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1953, 185); and that the idea of giving the (precise)<sup>25</sup> location for any experiences is misguided. The appreciative response to all art—for example, to painting—can be as much a response of the whole person as anything; in particular, nothing specific here about the bodily nature of dance makes the spectator’s role more (or less) bodily. Of course, what one is looking at (or listening to) includes bodies in motion, at least in typical cases. But, to make appropriate sense of them (to not misperceive them), I must recognize (experience) them as dances, and this means to experience them transfigured. If what I see is simply movement I cannot be appreciating the dance, because I am not experiencing the dance any more than the person whose attention to a music performance is entirely circumscribed by its financial implications can be truly experiencing the music, even though he sits through the sounds.

As often is the case, it has been helpful to begin our thinking about dance from our thinking about other performing arts, and especially music, as we have seen. Here, though, there is a key difference (of an ontological sort) between the position of dancer and musician:<sup>26</sup> for, at least in typical cases, the musician produces “just those things of which the witnessable work consists” (Urmson 1976, 243), while the dancer’s actions instantiate the dance. Yet what we learn is the irrelevance of the dancer’s perspective on the dance: for what is minimally required of the dancer is just dancing, thereby instantiating (or bringing into existence) the dance. In typical cases, we take dancing with understanding to be preferable to (better than) dancing lacking understanding. But these cannot be simply the same dancing in the two cases; rather, dancing with understanding is dancing (subtly) different from dancing without understanding;<sup>27</sup> if we call the difference “imperceptible” we are completely wrong, for we have perceived it, even if we cannot readily say how. And

what we require of the dancers is just that dancing, where our explanation of it need not be revealing, as we might follow Wittgenstein in saying, "In the beginning was the deed" (*Culture and Value*, p. 31; *On Certainty*, sec. 402; see McFee 1990).

In fact, these differences reinforce (for some thinkers)<sup>28</sup> the inappropriateness of an appeal to dancer experience: the internal or bodily character of dancers' experience makes it even less suitable as a model of attention to the work as a whole than that of musicians, who at least produce sounds out there, available aurally both to the producer or other musicians. (This is Scruton's [1997, 456]<sup>29</sup> point: that the central musical experience is one of hearing, with sounds as "secondary objects" [Scruton 1997, 2, 7] rather than secondary qualities.) Moreover, how might the experience of, say, this dance be contrasted with the experience of that? As is widely recognized,<sup>30</sup> this cannot be revealingly done in terms of some distinctive "feel" here. Rather, the difference for philosophical purposes is located in what is experienced; that is, the difference lies in the intentional object (Scruton 1997, 227–28; McFee 1997, 37) of that experience. As we might put it, the experience is of the intentional object of that experience (and hence is only characterizable via discussion of that intentional object [which here is the dance work]). Once this is granted, it (again) focuses philosophical interest back onto works themselves, rather than onto differential experiences of them. For one can only understand the second difference in terms of the first.

Indeed, this fact is clear once we recognize the different experiences of a cricket match offered by watching, say, a wicket being taken and (re-)watching that wicket on an action-replay screen. (Were these not distinguishable, we would have no [sporting] reason to go to matches nor reason to watch the players rather than the "big screen" when we were there.) For, while the experience is different, in what ways is it so? To answer here will return us to the intentional objects of those experiences. For the intentional object of experience of the dance must be the dance, not something else; in particular, it must count as an instantiation of the dance (a performance of it), not a recording of that dance. And one feature that drives us in the direction is the role of real-time as one characteristic (among many) distinguishing these experiences of performances. For it seems right that typically, for genuine performances, "the sounds [for dance, the movements] to which the audience attends are sequenced and coordinated by human performers in real-time, in the presence of an audience, for that audience" (Gracyk 1997, 140). And the actions of dancers (in typical dances) are performed in real-time in just this way. Thus for dance (if less reliably for music), "the appreciation of a performance includes evaluation of these actions" (Gracyk 1997, 140).

### *Recording: An Ontological Issue?*

In this light, then, I shall address the application to dance of an argument (about music) that asks whether the hearing of a recording is "a superior mode of access to music" (Gracyk 1997, 148). In considering the tentative



“yes” answer, Ted Gracyk deploys two main strategies: first, to imagine the experience of the recorded music supplemented by skillfully recorded (video) versions of, say, the pianist’s playing, what (of artistic significance) is then missing? The second strategy is to imagine what would be lacking from a world in which there were recordings but no live performances (in particular, from the artistic life of such a world). If the answer is “nothing” or only events of social (rather than artistic) significance, Gracyk could conclude that performances<sup>31</sup> have no artistic role beyond that filled by recordings.

For Gracyk, one issue seems to be “roughly” how one could get the same experience as attending a concert, or an experience equivalent for artistic purposes. Indeed, he explains “aesthetic experience” (by which, in context, he means our artistic experience) as “the rewards of grasping a musical work under a particular interpretation as it unfolds in a series of sounds to which one listens attentively” (Gracyk 1997, 100).<sup>32</sup> So the emphasis for him is on equivalent experience. As we have seen, that is not our question; rather, for us, the question is one about replicating (or, better, instantiating) the features of the dance work. For, as Gracyk (1997, 142) recognizes: “The sounds heard during normal playback offer either a reproduction or a representation of its performance.” Whatever we say for music, for dance we can note that neither reproductions (say, of painting) nor representations (of those paintings) are artworks; and that what we need here is that our access be to the works themselves, to their properties or features.

Of course, one problem here concerns the “open-ness” of the “properties of the work,” given the variety of ways those properties might be instantiated in different performances. But that is just a fact about the properties of abstract objects such as dances and need not detain us unduly here. The question of recording, though, seems to be a key question for dance, since much of the study of dance today begins from dance on video. (Indeed, it is the question of whether, in seeing videos, one is genuinely seeing the dances themselves, the artworks.) Moreover, one should not be too idealistic here; we agree that my grandson beats me at chess, even though I give him a queen advantage. In that context, though not in all, this counts as playing chess. In a similar vein, in some contexts I have been watching *Swan Lake* even though all I have seen is the video. (After all, I certainly have not been watching some other dance!) But, for most discussions in philosophical aesthetics, this would not count as experiencing the dance work, and part of the reason here is that (in watching the video) I cannot be experiencing some of the work’s crucial artistic features/properties. Hence there are elements of the work’s meaning that are logically beyond comprehension on that basis; they are necessarily lacking from what can be watched on video (although this may still be a lot better than nothing!).

So what are the features/properties of a dance work, properly seen (that is, the work’s artistic features)? We are used to the idea that one might study an artwork with attention to something less than the properties of the work itself. As Wollheim (1986, 11) notes: “Since the days of the great Heinrich Wölfflin, art historians have tended to identify the objects of their enquiry with those

properties of a painting which a good slide preserves.” But we typically recognize these as second-best, used for want of access to the works themselves. What makes this problematic for music is the suggestion that music is just organized sound; then the CD, say (in providing access to the relevant organized sound), might seem to provide access to the artwork. Here, Gracyk (1997, 148) concludes: “I am not claiming that recordings are, on balance, a superior mode of access to music.” But he is claiming, at least implicitly, that recordings are one mode of access to the music itself (although he rehearses some reason to doubt this—basically, that it is not a performance [Gracyk 1997, 140]), and that is, if not an ontological claim, at least a claim with ontological implications.

This is not the place to debate that ontology; at the very least, it is far less plausible for dance just because of the physicality of (typical) dances. It is easier to point to features the recordings of dances lack. Indeed, if we doubt the idea of just having recording for dance, it is partly because we cannot even imagine how that thesis might be applied to dance. (Those who claim that dance is “just movement” are making a polemical point [UD, 253; Cavell 1969, 221].)

Of course, such an emphasis on recording would minimize the impact of individual virtuosity on the part of performers. But it is important to recognize (as Gracyk [1997, 144–45] does) that virtuosity as such is not the issue for two reasons, reflecting the different claims of virtuosity. We cannot see the artistic value of virtuosity for its own sake, what Belinda Quirey (1976, 122) dismissed as “circus tricks” (and see Rhees [1969, 136] regarding the “trapeze artist”). Like tongue-twisters, such virtuosity for its own sake is not an artistic virtue. Nevertheless, certain virtuoso performances can become famous and acquire, for a while, a notoriety as the (ideal) way to, for instance, perform a certain role. We hear, in reviews and from friends, about the height of the jumps or the degree of the leg extensions as though they were essential features of the dancer’s dramatic characterization (or whatever). And, of course, this kind of gusto can undeniably make dance performances more vivid, more likely to stick in one’s memory. But to the degree that one’s attention is captivated by this virtuosity, it is not on the central artistic features of the dance before one. The “interpretative” virtuosity of the performer (seen through this “performer’s interpretation” [UD, 100–101]) gives us reason to attend to his or her performance as different from others, but, of course, that interpretation could be recorded (as we might think Pollini’s interpretation of Schoenberg’s piano music has). So that this reason alone will not motivate attention to performances rather than recordings, since it seems capable of appearing in recordings.

Second, this other kind of virtuosity, the one plainly of artistic relevance, is an interpretive one that “makes greater demands on a performer’s understanding than the sorts of skills most often associated with virtuosity” (Thomas Mark, quoted in Gracyk [1997, 144]). Here the difficulty can lie in performing the work as a unity; as with some music,<sup>33</sup> one such difficulty is apparent

in the complexity of a performing ensemble, of fitting together with the other dancers when there is no clear, overarching relation (such as unison or canon) between your movements and theirs. But virtuosity of this sort, unlike the “circus tricks” variety, will not bring rapturous applause from uninformed audiences. Rather, it will involve the thoughtful, intelligent performance of the work. Indeed, we might not even regard this as virtuosity, although it is both clearly craft-skill of the highest order and the province of the few among dancers, as elsewhere.

### *Performance Traditions and Traditions of Performance*

It is worth reflecting on the abiding appeal of particular artworks, the sort of thing sometimes (with some justice) enshrined in the idea of a test of time. For, in urging the value of artworks, we are urging their enduring value. But how is this to be explained? One way points to the possibility of continually “finding something new” in a particular artwork; we might characterize this in terms of (subtly) different critics’ interpretations of those works. And, of course, this applies (when it does) across the arts. But performing arts have an additional set of possibilities here. Thus we might take differences in performances as crucial to the abiding appeal of performing arts. And such differences might be of two sorts: first, differences of the “performer’s interpretation,” as when Pollini’s Schoenberg opus 19 differs from Glen Gould’s; or, second, the differences in performances as such, as when Pollini plays opus 19 with a slightly different emphasis today compared with yesterday, although both are his performer’s interpretation. (Very often, performances will differ in both ways, although typical audiences will be most aware of one aspect or the other.)

But the parallel, applied to dance, may be more revealing. For dance performances generally offer these differences each time: for we may see the same dance, in the same performer’s interpretation, but with different dancers, and on a performance area of a different size (or even a wholly different type, as I saw William Louthier dance his solo masterpiece *Vesalii Icones* [1970]<sup>34</sup> under a proscenium arch and “in the round”). Hence work in the performing arts has a kind of inexhaustibility additional to that of the other arts. But it would be a mistake to treat all such cases as ones where the audience is just spotting mistakes, or waiting for errors of virtuosity, so these are not of the “crash and burn” type that Gracyk (1997, 144–45) imagines, but of the intelligent (and hence reasoned) re-doing. Two points here: first, the arts as such do not need such “re-doing,” but is a feature of typical performing arts, following from the possibility of seeing the very same artwork at different times and in different places. Second, the idea that it is reasoned here gives important guidance. For we cannot see such reasoning as entirely the province of one dancer or stager. Rather, the thought of “reason” here points to (and highlights the importance of) two aspects of “skill”: what might be called both a *performance tradition* and a *tradition of performance*.

Of course, these are really only separable for analytical purposes. By the first I mean that performers require appropriate skills in order to perform par-

ticular works, and especially works of the past. Begin here by thinking about dance techniques (such as the Graham technique) that, while they constitute bodily conditioning and the “inculcating [of] certain fairly specific bodily skills” (UD, 201), also involve the learning (or at least, acquisition) of a “vocabulary” of movements appropriate for dances created using those techniques. In this sense, then, Marcia Siegel (1972, 107) is right to speak of “technique-as-aesthetic.” Those of us who watch performances by dancers in training, and by poorly trained dancers, become adept at noting when this is missing: in the lack of appropriate bodily tension for such-and-such, or the lack of a “feel” for this choreography (for me, the second being most clearly manifest in Nureyev’s dancing of Graham dances) (see Siegel [1979, 202]; Croce [1978, 162]; UD [203]). Moreover, the history of most techniques, coming from the requirements of specific dances for the companies concerned (UD, 205), reflects this connection between technique and dance-character. And, even if the training of dancers is no longer built on specific techniques such as these, that training still involves their learning to perform the patterns of movement appropriate to particular dances. (One fear, at least on the part of old fogies such as me, is that what is learned is inadequate to perform dances of the past; if so, this would be a flaw in training and criticizable as such.) On this model, though, dancers undergo a kind of apprenticeship in which they learn two (or two-and-a-half) crafts: they undergo the bodily training and are inducted into the understanding of the movements (and the dances) that result, and they may in this way gain insight into choreographic processes (although they need not [so this is the “half”]). All this is what I am calling a “performance tradition”: dancers learn to perform and to understand in a dancerly way dances. And that, of course, allows the performances of dances of the past in what I earlier called a “reasoned” way; that is, in new performers’ interpretations (UD, 100–101). Without such a tradition there would be no one capable of performing certain dances, and so, even if the dances were “preserved” (say, in notated form), they could not be danced. Just such a performance tradition would be threatened if attention to recordings replaced attention to dances. (Interestingly, the substance of Gracyk’s position seems to assume the continuation of a performance tradition, part of what he means by a “craft tradition” [Gracyk 1997, 144].)<sup>35</sup>

But there is another aspect of performance that needs to be ensured (although, as above, the contrast can really only be drawn for analytical purposes), and that I call a “tradition of performance.” By this I mean that an audience of “competent judges” (McFee 2001, 104–8) for dance works is required; and such an audience would require the understanding of these works through experience of them as performed. It would also embody the contemporary understanding of how the works should (typically) be performed, an understanding that later staggers might contest profitably in making new versions of particular (extant) dances, and one to which choreographers could respond (as Mats Ek does in his comic traducings of the typical expectations of classical ballet, such as in his *Swan Lake* [1987]). Such tradi-

tions form a background here (part of what Noël Carroll [1999, 25] calls “the lay of the art world”), which permits the choices made to be reasoned choices, defensible (in principle) in discussion. Without such a tradition, “however small and special” (Cavell 1969, xxvii), choices here could only be arbitrary.

To bring out some of these issues, let us ask: does the performance tradition for, say, the current Royal Ballet dancers overlap sufficiently with those of (say) Paul Taylor or Ashton to permit the dancers to perform these choreographers’ works? Suppose that it does not (see Challis [1999]). The case in point suggests that the performance tradition required for these works either was never part of the training regime for these dancers (Taylor) or has ceased to be (Ashton), because, say, a British style of ballet performance, with its “emotional depth,” has been replaced by a Russian style with its “formal precision” (both quoted in Challis [1999, 147]). The outcome in the most extreme case would, of course, be to render the performances (and hence the works) unintelligible to a knowledgeable audience; in the less extreme case, this audience would just struggle to understand. An example familiar to some might be the unclarity of works as experienced in, say, some choreographic competitions, where the performance skill of dancers is insufficient (or inappropriate) in ways that make it difficult to see the dance (through these performances). Similarly, Rhees (1969, 159) speaks of “the way in which a piece of music may remain uninteresting until you hear it played by a really good pianist.”

So these difficulties have a direct bearing on dance experience, for the identification of dance meaning through such experience would remain problematic. Here, too, the audience needs to be able to recognize (at least) when dancers fail to instantiate a particular choreography.<sup>36</sup> And that will require both a performance tradition, as just noted, and also a tradition of performance that permits (a) the audience to distinguish interesting and valuable difference from mere mistake, and (b) the impact of “posterity” to lead to a revision of that judgment. For a “knowledgeable audience” just is one that can distinguish originality from mere novelty (is Matthew Bourne’s *Swan Lake* [1995] really doing anything new at the level of artistic meaning?) and can find the continuity within trivial changes. The upshot here is that the experience of dance has such traditions implicit within it. I do not mean, of course, that these traditions must be part of what the audience must know, if that means that all audience members must be able to recite the history, and so on, to us. Rather, the knowledge might well be acquired other than as a kind of book learning (it almost always will be for dancers) and be manifest in action and in intelligent attention.

## CONCLUSION



It is useful to take stock. We have noted how the capacity to “see” artistic properties (and hence artistic values) in an artwork might be thought about,

we have seen its dependence on various conceptual masteries (that is, on one's cognitive stock), even though this is not all that is involved. Many of our points, applying these insights to dance, have been negative: it is not built on empathy or a kinaesthetic sense, it does not require that one be (or think like or feel like) a dancer. All these are incoherent requirements. And, while there is clearly something that connects the possibility of dance to the reality of movement for most of us, this is a long way from a usable insight, because of the transfigurational aspect of art-status (Danto 1981) and hence of dance: what we see as dances are crucially different from any movements we encounter elsewhere. (If they resemble anything, it is the gestures of hand-languages such as ASL [American Sign Language] or Pagett or the conventional gestures of the hitchhiker—these at least are intentional communication, even if typically lacking the expressive element associated with embodiment.)

The upshot is that a philosophical investigation of dance experience will not, productively, discuss how (or, worse, if) such experience is central to the artistic appreciation of dance; nor can it attend to the nature of such experience (as though it had one nature). For, first, we recognize that one cannot really appreciate dances unless one has firsthand experience of them and unless one finds them powerful (or otherwise) on the basis of that experience. Further, the experience here is centrally that of the audience of dance. Second, experiences are not helpfully characterized in terms of their distinctive “feel” (part of what Wollheim [1984, 38, 42–45] calls their “phenomenology”), because the only exact characterization of the experience is in terms of the concepts under which the experience takes place (the concepts mobilized in that experience); exploring these concepts is exploring the experience. Third, while the experience is not exhausted by this focus on concepts, that is the part that can be examined. In particular, discussing “mobilization conditions” is really a positive-sounding version of the “recognized heads of exception” to claims to critical appreciation.

It might seem that these points, which could be made for the appreciation of any artform, must require modification when applied to dance. But we have seen that this is not so, for three related reasons: first, the appropriate perspective here is the perspective of the audience, and this is equally true for all artforms; second, the audience for dance is as much a visual and/or aural audience as the audience for painting or for music, respectively—dance offers nothing special here. In particular, the artistic experience of dance does not require one to experience dance other than perceptually (for example, kinaesthesia is not required [UD, 264–73]). Third, the distinctive experience of dancers is a quite separate topic and not one we would expect to be very revealing, given the variety within dancers, within dances, and within the perspectives on a particular dance afforded to each dancer. The solo dancer knows all of the dance “from the inside” (at least, all of the movement of the dance)<sup>37</sup> while one member of a group has that perspective only on his or her piece of the dance, and that may not be a useful perspective from which to take in the dance as a whole. (Certainly, we should readily grant the parallel

points for, say, musicians in an orchestra, although, as we saw earlier, their relation to the music differs from the dancers' relation to the dance.)

In conclusion, this chapter should be seen as exploring three main areas:

- The usefulness, when considering artistic experience, of focus on artistic concepts, a thesis here exemplified for dance; or, as I put it initially, nothing can usefully be said about the dance experience that is not more helpfully discussed in terms of the concepts mobilized.
- Some of the ramifications, for the experience of dance, of the embodied character of artistic meaning, here recognizing the experiential character of (some) artistic concepts.
- Some of the implications of the need for artistic experience here to be of the dance itself (rather than, say, of a recording of it), thus saying something about the nature of dance works.

## NOTES



1. Thus Danto (1997, 195): "To be a work of art is to be (i) about something, and (ii) to embody its meaning."

2. In Danto (1981), we are (familiarily) invited to consider "confusable counterparts": "Where at least one of the counterparts is about something, or has a content, or a subject, or a meaning" (1981, 139). Such-and-such is not "about" anything: "but that is because it is a thing, and things, as a class, lack aboutness just because they are things" (1981, 3). "By contrast, artworks are typically about something" (1981, 3). "For artworks' aboutness being the crucial differentiating property" (1981, 81). This is something we learn in, roughly, learning "how to go on" (Wittgenstein 1953, secs. 151, 179) in art. For as Danto (1992, 46) puts it: "The art world is the discourse of reasons institutionalized, and to be a member of the art world is, accordingly, to have learned what it means to participate in the discourse of reasons for one's culture."

3. Kivy (1975, 197–211): quotation (rectified for the artistic/aesthetic contrast), page 210. See also McFee (1997).

4. See Best (1978, 113–16; 1992, 165–80); and UD (1992a, 42–44, 168–82).

5. Most explicitly in "Art, Beauty and the Ethical," read to a Joint Conference of the British Society of Aesthetics/Dutch Society for Aesthetics, Antwerp, September 1996: see also McFee (1999, 169).

6. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (1981); UD (1992a, 51–52).

7. N.B. There is a commitment to value in the minimal sense that art status gives one reason to ascribe value to the objects, but this may be defeated. See McFee (1989, 230–38) and compare Cavell (1969, 253 and note on intention): "I do not wish to claim that everything we find in a work of art is something we have to be prepared to say that the artist intended to put there. But I am claiming that our not being so prepared must be exceptional. Our concept of a work of art is such that what is not intended in it has to be thought of, or explained, in contrast to intention, at the same

level as intention, as the qualification of a human action." What goes for intention goes equally for some other artistic properties including artistic value.

8. That Danto cannot take this line follows from his conception of the role of any conditions he identifies. Finding that *X* is sometimes not relevant is taken to show it never is! For him, conditions must be (individually) necessary and (jointly) sufficient for art status, on pain of breaking down the artwork/"real thing" barrier.

9. Although it would usually be odd to do so, the requirement for mobilization might even be pressed (in some cases) for color concepts; then (say) some blind people might be thought to have a concept they could not mobilize.

10. In a paper read to an Anglo-French Aesthetics Conference, Oxford, April 2000.

11. See Wisdom (1991, 113–14). King David knew something about his treatment of Uriah and Bathsheba before Nathan told him the parable of the sheep, but his eyes were opened by that parable.

12. Moreover, the connection between such understanding and performance of the work is clear enough. As Wittgenstein asks, "Would it make sense to ask a composer whether one should hear a figure like this or like this; if that didn't also mean: whether one should play it this way or that?" (*Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* [1980], sec. 1130). As this rhetorical question urges, both hearing the figure in a certain way and playing it in that way are implicated in the nature of the work.

13. So that, for example, "a secondary quality is a property the ascription of which to an object is not adequately understood except as true, if it is true, in virtue of the object's disposition to present a certain sort of perceptual appearance" (McDowell 1998, 133).

14. Compare *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), sec. 402: "We are tempted to say that our way of speaking does not describe the facts as they really are. As if, for example, the proposition 'he has pains' could be false in some other way than by the man's not having pains. As if the form of expression were saying something false even when the proposition *faute de mieux* asserted something true."

15. See Mackie (1977, 15); Wright (1992, 6); and McDowell (1998, 112).

16. See Putnam (1999, 21–41, 128–30).

17. And, of course, this is clear from McDowell's discussion of the comparison of value, and especially moral value, and secondary qualities/properties.

18. The issue of how to characterize the meaning of artworks that are multiples (as dance is [UD (1992a), 88–90]) is postponed here.

19. Compare Beardsmore (1971, 17–18). Note that we are not denying that Dickens's novels, say, might be sufficiently similar that something of the same "aboutness" might be shared by two of them.

20. As in the case Jorge Luis Borges imagined ("Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote" [1962, 42–51]), the difference in authorship (in "history of production") between two works might well make them distinguishable for artistic purposes; for instance, the later work might be mannered in a way the earlier could not.

21. N.B. (i) See the Mister Johnson discussion in Beardsmore (1971, 9–15) for elaboration of the reasons to be offered here; and (ii) cases of performing art (and some other multiples) are put aside, although clearly here difference among performances is tolerated by same-work continuity.

22. See Best (1978, 121) on the different fates of Toller Cranston and John Curry.

23. Foster (1996, 253). (An example of some of the required detail occurs earlier in this important text.)

24. We should, of course, recognize the intention implicit in communicative acts; see Travis (1989, 17–35).



25. The force of “precise” here is both important and difficult. The aim is to permit that, if I am in Eastbourne, one might not deny that, say, my pain is too; but that no final detail could be given. This point is easy to miss. Thus, for example, my antipathy to the precise temporal location of dreams (McFee 1994a, especially 106) was intended to admit the claim that my dreams took place while I was asleep without permitting further discussion of any “precise location” (spatial, temporal). This strategy was misunderstood by Squires (1995, especially 84–85).

26. Despite my seeing both as producers in some places (UD [1992a], 106) and compare the discussion in Meskin (1999), I am nearer the truth elsewhere; for example, in contrasting the music case with dance, performing (at least) movements of the body (UD [1992a], 100). See also McFee (1994b).

27. As Wittgenstein asks (with an implied “no” answer): “But you do speak of understanding music. You understand it, surely, while you are hearing it! Ought we to say that this is an experience which accompanies the hearing?” (“Zeher,” sec. 159 [*Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* (1980), sec. 497]).

28. Not for me, but for anyone who thinks that such an internal perspective plays some crucial role in the dancers’ understanding of the work. In a clear sense, I think of dancers first and foremost as doing (or making) dances, hence not as understanding them, if this were contrasted with performing them with understanding.

29. He actually says that listening is “the core experience of all participants—composer, performer, audience, and dancer” (Scruton 1997, 456), but the context permits us to read it as successful listening; that is, as hearing.

30. See, for instance, Kivy (1990, 95–101).

31. Gracyk (1997, 141) notes the view (from Thom Godlovitch) that authenticity is “a feature of performances, not merely of sounds.” I take the point to be that sounds alone must be transfigured (that is, heard transfigured) to become the work, and it is the work that is performed.

32. How does one listen to musical works—not just listening, but whatever follows from transfiguration? Consider Collingwood (1938, 140–41), who urged in respect of music: “[W]hat we get out of the concert is . . . something which remains forever inaccessible to a person who cannot or will not make efforts of the right kind, however completely he hears the sounds that fill the room in which he is sitting.” We agree with Collingwood that merely hearing the sounds is insufficient for hearing the music.

33. As Michael Finnissy explained (in correspondence), with respect to a score of Webern’s: “The score is not technically difficult for any individual instrumental parts, although it demands (as with all of Webern’s music) extreme refinement and sensitivity in performance. Making two notes speak in a way that is going to be meaningful to the listener is much more difficult than playing an entire melody. The problem of performing Webern well is the problem of ensemble, for sounding together, of making your two tones blend with the two notes of someone else before and after you, and of sublimating individual virtuosity in an essentially unifying approach.” Also quoted in McFee (1978, 25n).

34. With music by Peter Maxwell Davis.

35. Without wishing to preclude further arguments, I would be much happier with a view of music that although it took recording to offer a superior mode of access to music (Gracyk 1997, 148), still guaranteed a performance tradition in which persons learned to play musical pieces, practiced them, and the like. My only worry would be whether this could be guaranteed once the ontological implications for music of the status of recording were acknowledged.

36. There are questions here about historicity: when is the case like “plastic” in Akenside’s eighteenth-century poem, when like transformed answers? See McFee (1992b, especially 313; 1995, especially 281–82).

37. This means, of course, that he or she can perform it, not (necessarily) describe it nor talk about it.

CHAPTER NINE

# *Aesthetic Experience and Experience of Art and Nature*

ARGUMENTS FROM INDIAN AESTHETICS



ANANTA CH. SUKLA

I



In the wake of analytic philosophy, structuralism, and semiotics, the attention of philosophers of art shifted from epistemology and metaphysics to the linguistic structure of both the world of objects and its subjective experience. The concept of experience itself was released from its affiliation to phenomenology of religion and sacred mysticism. It was no more an immediate awareness of something perceptually given to the subject. Instead, the linguistic structure of perceptual knowledge determined the validity of such knowledge. The age-old epistemological criterion of truth in the arts was taken over by the linguistic criterion of meaning, and consequently art's necessary relation with the world of reality was negated. Following the scientific method, philosophers searched for necessary and sufficient conditions in defining art and the way it is associated with the audience, the spectator's response to art by way of experience, perception, appreciation, evaluation, and interpretation. Analytic philosophers and semioticians questioned two major issues in the philosophy of art: first, whether art has a necessary relation with the world of nature by way of imitating/representing it or with the artist by way of expressing his emotions, and second, whether our experience of art is a peculiar kind of experience that differs from our experience of the real world. In the former

issue, all sorts of Platonic conceptualism, Aristotelian nominalism, and Hegelian idealism were discarded; any natural relation between art and the real world was rejected—representation was no more a question of resemblance but rather a linguistic reference, a semiotic denotation purely of a conventional character. This conventionalism reached its extreme point with the sociohistorical view that any artifact can be considered an artwork if an art world enfranchises it so. Any attempt at finding out any general definition of art, whether essentialist or functionalist or otherwise, was considered fruitless. The analytic conclusion was that art, like game, cannot be defined—it can only be described.

Similarly, our experience of the artwork was considered indefinable. Earlier, since Aristotle onward, art had a cathartic affect compared to the mystic experience of religious rites. In the Hegelian idealist tradition this experience was defined with an epithet “aesthetic” that demarcated it from other nonart experience. Along with its affiliation to religion, this “aesthetic experience,” as discovered by the American philosopher John Dewey, attained a paradigmatic status for explaining the nature of human experience itself.<sup>1</sup> According to Dewey, aesthetic experience is the “experience in which the whole creature is alive.” By understanding aesthetic experience, one understands experience as a whole. If aesthetic experience is the measure of experience of a cultured human being, art, according to Dewey, is also the measure of the quality of human culture. Dewey defined art in terms of “aesthetic experience,” which is a dynamic process, not merely a passive reception or an illusion of the audience. Aesthetic experience, according to Dewey, is objectified in a work of art that is the very content of this experience: “There can be no aesthetic experience apart from an *object*, and . . . for an object to be the content of aesthetic appreciation it must satisfy those objective conditions without which . . . [the necessary conditions of aesthetic experience] are impossible.” Art as aesthetic experience results only when one’s “images and emotions are also tied to the object, and . . . fused with the matter of the object.”<sup>2</sup>

Later, another American philosopher, Monroe C. Beardsley, defined art in terms of its function of affording an aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experience, according to Beardsley, is “aesthetically qualified experience” designating that an experience with marked aesthetic character is called “aesthetic experience.” He offers five features of aesthetic experience:<sup>3</sup>

- a. It is directed toward an object;
- b. what comes has the air of being freely chosen;
- c. the object is emotionally distanced;
- d. there is active discovery of connections, and so on; and
- e. there is a sense of integration between oneself as a person and the object of interest.

The first feature is the necessary, and any four, including the first, are the suf-

ficient conditions of aesthetic experience. The basic nature of aesthetic experience, according to Beardsley, is somewhat hedonistic: "A certain kind of experience that can be enjoyed in itself," the value of this enjoyability being intrinsic rather than instrumental—valuable in itself, serving not as a means for some other ulterior purpose.

Aesthetic experience is thus understood as a particular way in which an artwork is experienced. This "way" as the "aesthetic way" refers to the peculiarly delightful nature of the audience's experiencing an artwork. "Aesthetic delight" is distinguished from the other kinds of delight one derives in experiencing objects, events, situations, actions, and so on in the practical life such as earning a lot of money, seeing a friend accidentally, having a promotion in service, enjoying sex, and so on. Tracing the source of this distinction of aesthetic experience, philosophers like Edward Bullough and Jerome Stolnitz have discovered a specific "attitude" of the audience that enables or qualifies them to experience a thing aesthetically.<sup>4</sup> This attitude, which they call "aesthetic attitude," is responsible for experiencing not only an artwork, but also any object or situation aesthetically. For Bullough, anything can be experienced aesthetically if the subject maintains a "psychic distance," that is, if he is not attached to it personally. Following Immanuel Kant, Stolnitz coins a word, "disinterestedness," which means the same as Bullough's notion of psychic distance—the lack of all kinds of practical interest or ulterior purpose in experiencing anything. To be precise, aesthetic experience refers to a delightful experience that is due to experiencing the object for its own sake. In its Kantian origin, this view indicates that aesthetic experience is not limited to the experience of artworks only. One can experience everything aesthetically provided he has an aesthetic attitude. Art historian Erwin Panofsky thinks that there is no special kind of attitude that the audience should have toward an object other than total concentration upon it: "It is possible to experience every object, natural or man-made aesthetically . . . when we look at it without relating it intellectually or emotionally to anything outside of itself. . . . Only he who simply and wholly abandons himself to the object of his perception will experience it aesthetically."<sup>5</sup> Panofsky's notion of an object without any intellectual or emotional relation (or response) is unable to explain the nature of aesthetic experience. If our perceptual experience of an object is neither intellectual nor emotional, then what it is? How to explain it exactly? On the other hand, the Kantians like Bullough and Stolnitz who, like Panofsky, believe that anything can be experienced aesthetically (man-made and natural), explain this experience in terms of a specific kind of emotional response, namely, a disinterested pleasure.

Critics have severely attacked this theory and have argued that this so-called aesthetic attitude must presuppose a specific quality of the object of experience, which might be called "aesthetic quality," whatever that quality or a group of qualities may be. If anything is experienced in any way, the world of objects is reduced to subjective illusions. There must be some justification for an object in order for it to be experienced in a particular way. George Dickie

is the chief opponent of this "aesthetic attitude." Milton Snoeyenbos, supporting Dickie, concludes that "contrary to the original intent of such theorists as Bullough and Stolnitz, we have a theory based on the concept of aesthetic property rather than aesthetic interest. The theoretical burden then shifts to an elucidation of the aesthetic/non-aesthetic property distinction."<sup>6</sup> Monroe Beardsley devises a phrase called "aesthetic interest" by which he means an "interest in form and quality" of the artwork.

But what exactly is the aesthetic quality or group of qualities of an object that can be distinguished from other qualities? The qualities that are aesthetically relevant are undoubtedly sensory (to follow the derivation of the *aesthetic* from the Greek *aesthesis*), though some of them may not always be *perceptual*, the process of conceptualization based on their perceptuality being necessary. The third quality of aesthetic relevance is the organic arrangement of different elements in a complex or "unique form." But these qualities are necessary also for our everyday, common cognition of an object. To answer this question, recourse is sometimes taken to the concept of taste coming back again to a subjective quality of the audience: one with good taste is able to distinguish the aesthetic quality from the nonaesthetic.

Obviously, since taste is a spatiotemporal and sociohistorical phenomenon, there cannot be any objective definition of it. Ted Cohen rejects all possibilities of distinguishing aesthetic qualities from nonaesthetic by means of the concept of taste.<sup>7</sup> Yet another possible quality as aesthetic has been tried—beauty, and passionate debates have been raised regarding the objectivity and subjectivity of this quality. Kant has rejected the possibility of an objective principle of beauty, its determining ground being "the feeling of the subject." Roger Fry, aiming at an objective view of beauty, distinguishes two uses of this word: one for the *sensuous charm* of the object, which is limited to its immediately perceptual aspects; the other is *supersensual*, which "is concerned with the *appropriateness and intensity of the emotions* aroused. When these emotions are aroused in a way that satisfies fully the needs of the imaginative life, we approve and delight in the sensations through which we enjoy that heightened experience, because they possess purposeful order and variety in relation to these emotions."<sup>8</sup>

Moving in a circle, aesthetic experience in its ambiguous interplay with the qualities of aesthetic object and attitude of the subject turns out ultimately to be an "emotional" response of the audience in which it experiences an enjoyment of a heightened order. This is hardly any improvement over the Aristotelian *catharsis* extended beyond its cultural affiliation. Any such emotional response thereby falls a victim to the affective fallacy of the New Critics who advocate a cognitive theory of aesthetic experience, rejecting all possible kinds of the affect of art on the audience that is inflicted like a bullet or administered like poison or infected like disease. "Poetry is characteristically a discourse about both emotions and knowledge, or about the emotive quality of object. The emotions correlative to other objects of poetry become a part of the matter dealt with . . . contemplated as a pattern of knowledge."<sup>9</sup>

There have been two ardent supporters of the New Critical cognitive theory in contemporary analytical philosophy of art: Nelson Goodman and Arthur Danto. Goodman's semiotic approach to art undermines its concern with emotion and phenomenological immediacy. Art as a symbolic (conventional) representation offers an inferential rather than any perceptual experience: Goodman therefore defines aesthetic experience as a "cognitive experience distinguished [from science and other domains] by the dominance of certain symbolic characteristics."<sup>10</sup> According to him, emotion is not an essential aesthetic feature; therefore aesthetic experience is not an emotional state of mind or an emotional experience of the audience. It is a cognitive experience where the audience discerns five (provisional) aesthetic symptoms exhibited by a work of art:

1. *syntactic density*, where the finest differences in certain respects constitute a difference between symbols—for example, an ungraded mercury thermometer as contrasted with an electronic digital-readout instrument;
2. *semantic density*, where symbols are provided for things distinguished by the finest differences in certain respects (not only the ungraded thermometer again but also ordinary English, though it is not syntactically dense);
3. *relative repleteness*, where comparatively many aspects of a symbol are significant—for example, a single-line drawing of a mountain by Hokusai where every feature of shape, line, thickness, and so on counts, in contrast with perhaps the same line as a chart of daily stock-market averages, where all that counts is the height of the line above the base;
4. *exemplification*, where a symbol, whether or not it denotes, symbolizes by serving as a sample of properties it literally or metaphorically possesses; and finally
5. *multiple and complex reference*, where a symbol performs several integrated and interacting referential functions, some direct and some mediated through other symbols.<sup>11</sup>

Methodologically, Goodman thinks that aesthetic experience is coextensive with art, and this experience (not emotional, but cognitive) is the criterion of our experience of art—as demarcated from the experience of nonart phenomena. He further thinks that by defining aesthetic experience in terms of semantics, the response of the audience is treated as a dynamic process rather than a passive affect of that phenomenologically given.

On the other hand, Arthur Danto tries to release aesthetic experience from its affective and hedonistic role by introducing a linguistic function of the audience's response—what he calls "interpretation": "There is no appreciation without interpretation . . . interpretations are what constitute works . . . inter-

pretation consists in determining the relationship between a work of art and its material counterpart."<sup>12</sup> Taking perceptual properties (as they appear in the audience's experience) alone, one cannot distinguish artworks from their nonartistic counterparts, as in the case of Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*. Danto's Saussurean approach to the structure of artworks in explaining the function of interpretation as discerning a system of difference determines aesthetic experience as a cognitive response rather than any emotional affect. The concept of aesthetic experience as an emotional response/affect is a "danger" because of its implied hedonism.

The recent neopragmatist move for an "edifying" philosophy<sup>13</sup> has tried to rescue aesthetic experience from the attack of these analytic philosophers by rejecting the very presupposition of these "mainstream"/"systematic" (analytic) philosophers who are fond of institutionalizing their vocabulary to avoid the shortcomings of their previous tradition. These mainstream (analytic) philosophers (Goodman, Dickie, and Danto) say:

Now that such-and-such a line of inquiry has had such a stunning success, let us reshape all inquiry, and all of culture, on its model, thereby permitting objectivity and rationality to prevail in areas previously obscured by convention, superstition, and the lack of a proper epistemological understanding of man's ability accurately to represent nature.<sup>14</sup>

Instead, the recent "peripheral"<sup>15</sup> philosophers do not agree to accept any particular "system" as capable of institutionalizing all the areas of cultural vocabulary. Therefore, the validity of aesthetic experience need not be put to any "analytic" framework of examination. Dewey's "naturalistic metaphysics" provides a method that is an alternative for validating this "genuine feature" of human experience. His metaphysics intends to study "the large and constant features of human sufferings, enjoyments, trials, failures, and successes together with the institutions of art, science, technology, politics, and religion which mark them, communicate genuine features of the world within which man lives."<sup>16</sup> His is a metaphysics of the common man, the novelty of which "lies in the use of the method to understand a group of special problems which have troubled philosophy."<sup>17</sup> The analytic demand for a scientific explanation of aesthetic experience is rejected by the edifying philosophers in favor of keeping "space open for the sense of wonder, which poets can sometimes cause—wonder that there is something new under the sun . . . something that (at least for the moment) cannot be explained and can barely be described."<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, some sociobiologists advocating an evolutionary value of art stress this very affective aspect of artworks, which alone justifies their emergence and survival and as also accounts for the survival of humanity itself, making living worthwhile.<sup>19</sup> Such a move proves indeed a strong counter to the "waning of affect"<sup>20</sup> in the era of postmodernism.



## II



The pragmatist and sociobiological defenses of aesthetic experience apart, there is yet another way to rescue this valuable human experience from its undue decline. Sanskrit critics of preclassical and classical India had a serious concern for explaining the nature of our response to dramatic performance. Although they did not generalize this response to explain our experience of all forms of art—an aesthetic experience in general—their views and arguments are of immense significance in understanding both the strength and weakness of the Western theory of aesthetic experience and in helping us resolve some of the problems that complicate the issue, saving it finally from its total rejection. It is useful to summarize first some of the relevant points that result from the debate of the Sanskrit critics:<sup>21</sup>

- Our response to a dramatic performance is an emotional experience that is wholesomely delightful.
- This delight is different from other kinds of delight one experiences in one's personal life: sometimes enjoying an event or an object for its own sake such as a sexual experience, and at times, for an ulterior purpose such as a professional promotion, winning a lottery, or removing a rival.
- This emotional delight is different from all sorts of intellectual and cognitive delight such as solving an unsolved mathematical problem or discovering a historical or scientific truth.
- But this delight is on par with the delight in experiencing the highest or transcendental ultimate Reality by the meditation of a mystic (*yogin*), with the difference that a mystic loses his personal or subjective identity, being completely free from all kinds of sensory awareness, whereas an audience of a drama, though losing its personal identity and all sorts of practical bias, experiences the truth of life (human, divine, and demonic) in its general form presented by the sensory aspects (physical, psychic, verbal, and visual constituents) of the performance as a whole. The mystic delight of a *yogin*, being devoid of emotionality, is abstract, but the dramatic experience being colored (*anurañjita*) with emotion is of a perceptual kind that can be described in terms of a gustatory metaphor such as relishing a dish of rice mixed with several kinds of curry. As experiences of the truth, in their own respective forms, both are different modes of enlightenment. And as a mode of enlightenment both are intrinsically valuable.
- This experience is, therefore, neither an *influence* nor an *affect* of the performance on the audience. Since the dramatic performance, independent of its experiential form in the audience, is not an artwork,

there is no cause-and-effect relation between the artwork and its subjective experience.

- Although the performance has no objective existence outside the subjective experience, it is not that the subjective experience has no reference to the performance as an object. In fact, this experience presupposes two conditions: a) that the performance is a representational system, and b) that the subject is well aware of the fact that he experiences a representation of reality and not the reality itself.
- This delight (or delightful experience) does not refer to our responses to all the forms of art, but primarily to the response to a dramatic performance that is the only full-fledged representational form of art. The delight of reading any literary text, including the script of a drama, is of the same kind. But the perceptuality of this textual experience is not as perfect or direct as that of the dramatic performance. A reader has to exercise his creative imagination for converting his semantic experience to a full-fledged audio-visual one. Hence the semantic communication of literature is not as effective as the audio-visual communication of the dramatic performance, and this is the reason why reading is less popular than theater-going.

### III



Now to the details. Sanskrit philosophers used no words that can be translated into the English expression “aesthetic experience.” But a theory that developed out of their explanation of our response to a dramatic performance highlights some of the major features of what the Western aestheticians designate as “aesthetic experience.” As early as the fourth century B.C. Bharata described our experience of the theater as follows:

As people delightfully eat (*āsvādayanti*) the food prepared with several ingredients (curries, spices, etc.) and are therefore called *Sumanasah* (persons with delightful mind), so also the audience, who relish (or taste, *āsvādayanti*) the permanent emotion in combination with different (subordinate) emotions and kinds of acting such as verbal, physical, and mental are called *Sumanasah* (since like the varieties of food eaten delightfully the permanent emotions are relished in the theater). These permanent emotions are called *rasa*.<sup>22</sup>

There are three significant points in this statement: first, our response to the theatrical performance is a perceptual experience, metaphorically of a gustatory type similar to our relishing varieties of food on a table; second, both the performance and the audience are independent of each other, neither being reduced nor reducible to the other; and finally, the audience relishes the

performance for the right reasons. Abhinavagupta (tenth century A.D.), the most authentic of the commentators on Bharata, explains the critical situation by way of clarifying the interrelationship among these three phenomena: a) the dramatic presentation (or representation), b) audience, and c) the experience of the dramatic performance by the audience. He provides an unambiguous picture of the entire situation by highlighting, what might be called in current idiom, the interplay of all four dimensions of the experience concerned: the evaluative, phenomenological, semantic, and demarcational-definitional dimensions.<sup>23</sup> The basic aim of the audience in witnessing a theatrical performance is enjoyment—a wholesome delight of nonordinary type that is free from all sorts of relativism. This delight is compared, in kind, to the mystic experience of the *yogins*, which they attain through great penance and austerity—an experience of self-realization, the *somum bonum* of human beings where they are liberated from the miseries and relativism of their earthly existence. The difference between these two types of delight lies in their varying degrees: once a *yogin* experiences this delight, he continues to have it forever, whereas an audience of the theater relishes the experience only as long as the performance continues. The common nature of both of these experiences, however, is the loss of one's individual identity, the loss of the subject-object dualism that determines the whole of our worldly life. The method of a *yogin* is contemplation on the very nature of man's being, that is, pure consciousness, whereas an audience of the theater surrenders its limited individuality or ego by identifying its personal experience of worldly happiness and sorrows with those of the fictional or intentional characters of the drama. The theatrical experience is therefore both contemplative and sensuous. Abhinavagupta articulates this difference:

[Theatrical] enjoyment consists in the tasting of *one's own consciousness* (*svāt-mānupraveśa*); this tasting is endowed with extreme pleasantness, which it obtains from a contact with the various latent traces of pleasure, pain, etc. It differs both from ordinary perception, which is full of obstacles (pragmatic requirements, etc.) and from the perception of the *yogins*, which is not free from harshness, on account of the total lack of any tasting of external objects.<sup>24</sup>

Since, in its essence, this enjoyment is identified with the beatitude of the liberated self, its value is not merely hedonistic. It is on a par with the cognitive experience of the Ultimate Truth or Reality, the very nature of which is absolute consciousness. The liberated self savors nothing other than itself, its self-contained immaculate beatitude; the audience enjoys the performance—an event of the external world. Abhinavagupta clarifies this interplay between the external object and its subjective experience that determines the ontology of drama. The audience enters the auditorium with a motive/purpose/intention/attitude (*abhisandhi*) that it is going to enjoy a representational action (or performance) of actors and actresses accompanied by music and visual sets and so on: "Today I am going to enjoy sights and sounds of a nonordinary

nature." This awareness guards the audience against any identification of the man-made performance with an event of the real or ordinary world. This awareness also prevents it from having any illusory experience. Although in common parlance the word "drama" refers to this objective phenomenon of performance, in critical vocabulary the ontology of drama is not the performance as such, but the performance-as-it-is-immediately-presented to the consciousness of the spectator. In fact, it is this cognitive form of the spectator's consciousness that is relished, not the performance in its objectivity.

This special form of the spectator's cognition, the drama proper, is called by Abhinavagupta "*anuvyavasāya*," a Sanskrit term that literally means "after-contact." The term has different philosophical connotations (in the epistemology of different schools of Indian thought: such as "realism" of Nyāya, "dualism" of Sāṅkhya-Yoga, and "nondualism" of Kashmirian Saivism) explaining the nature of perceptual cognition.

Nyāya realists hold that there are two stages of perception: the first stage is a nonjudgmental awareness of the given, the indeterminate; and the second stage is a judgmental awareness that is determinate perception. *Vyavasāya* literally means a "contact"; and both these stages of perception are called *vyavasāya*, because Nyāya defines perception as a cognition by the sense-object contact. But there is also a third stage of perceptual cognition that follows the second. At the first sight of a pot, for example, one cognizes it as "something"—this is *something*. In the second stage the perception is judgmental: "This is a pot," and subsequently in the third stage the cognition is "I know this pot." This third stage is *anuvyavasāya*. But Abhinavagupta rejects this Nyāya connotation of *anuvyavasāya* in favor of the Sāṅkhya-Yoga view that there are only two stages of perception—the first, *vyavasāya*, being just the sense-object contact, the indeterminate one, and the subsequent judgmental determinate stage following (*anu*) the nonjudgmental indeterminate (*vyavasāya*) cognition. Abhinavagupta further accepts the Yoga view that determinate perception or *anuvyavasāya* is a creative function of the mind, which is translucent in correlating the subject-object dualism by means of linguistic relativism. The indeterminate, nonjudgmental perception is nonlinguistic, and it explains the experience of the *yogins* where there is no other alternative (*vikalpa*) constructs of the mind than the subjective consciousness itself.

In this indeterminate perception, cognition is nondiscursive and nonlinguistic. What is given here to the consciousness is the consciousness itself. This is the self-perception of a *yogin*. But in the determinate cognition, something other than the subjective consciousness is given, and this is the phenomenal world (*samvṛti*). When the Buddhists view this phenomenal world as being nonexistent, like two moons, only an intentional mental construct (*vikalpa*), the Jaina philosophers hold that this world may not be absolutely true like the Ultimate Reality—the Supreme Consciousness (experienced only by indeterminate perception)—but as the self-manifestation of the Supreme Reality it cannot be unreal either. In fact, it is also a kind of truth—or true in kind, if not in degree, because unreal (false) cannot come out of real (truth).

Further, what is experienced in *vyavasāya*, the “something” is a general phenomenon (*sādhyaṛaṇā*), and the experience of the *anuvyavasāya* is the particular (*viśeṣa*). Bharata has used the word *vikālpaka* to denote this particular, and Abhinavagupta uses the word *pratisāḁṣātkāra* as a synonym for both *vikālpaka* and *anuvyavasāya*. But, if the phenomenal world and drama (the performance) as events in the phenomenal world are both the objects (or experiences) of the *anuvyavasāya*, then how are they distinguished? The peculiarity of drama as an artwork is constituted by the phenomenon-as-experienced by the spectator. Left to itself, drama is just like any other event in ordinary life, namely, a group of people moving, talking, and behaving on a stage. This action is peculiarly meaningful when it is experienced by another set of people gathered in the auditorium with a particular purpose or attitude. They gather in the auditorium not with an attitude that what they would be experiencing is just a part of the events that occur outside the auditorium. Their attitude to the performance is clearly different from their attitude to the events of the outside world, and their preconception of the performance is responsible for such attitude. They know that what they are going to experience is an event that is neither the same as nor similar (likeness/imitation/copy/replica—*sādhya*—of) to the events (or objects) of the outside world. They know that what they would be perceiving in the sense of *sensing* or keeping the sensory contact (*vyavasāya*) with is the activity of the actors called in Sanskrit “*abhinaya*”—constituted by four factors such as verbal, physical, psychological, and visual. But what they would be perceiving in the sense of *experiencing* (*anuvyavasāya*) through and in this *abhinaya* are the events; for example, Rāma banishing Sitā or Othello killing Desdemona. Drama is therefore not what is *sensed*—the *vyavasāya*—but what is *experienced*—the *anuvyavasāya*.

It must be noted carefully that this *anuvyavasāya* is not exactly the same as the *anuvyavasāya* of (in) the practical (real) world, where the *sensed* and the *experienced* are identical. Abhinavagupta therefore mentions that the experience of drama is a *kind of anuvyavasāya*, not *anuvyavasāya* proper. He repeatedly states: “Drama is then a matter of a special form of *anuvyavasāya*.” . . . “Drama is only what appears in this *anuvyavasāya*.” . . . “Drama is only made up of *anuvyavasāya*, a form of consciousness triggered (*īṣita*) by a cognition of the particulars. . . .”<sup>25</sup> Another point of significance is that if *anuvyavasāya* as a determinate perception is a cognition of the particulars (*viśeṣa*) immediately presented to the sense organs, then the cognition of Rāma and Othello should be inferential rather than perceptual, acting or *abhinaya* functioning as an indexical sign system. It might be sounding illogical to say that the spectator *senses* the actors (representation) but *perceives* Rāma and Othello (represented). It is better to say that the represented is inferred from the representation, which is what actually Śaṅkuka, a predecessor of Abhinavagupta (eighth century A.D.), has argued in his commentary on Bharata. But Abhinavagupta insists that the represented is not *inferred* but *perceived* through the representation. He explains that the personal identity of the actor is completely lost because of the four aspects of performance; and second, assuming the proper

names of characters famous in myths and literary works such as Rāma, Othello, and so on and acting in accordance with the narrations and descriptions of these, actors lose their personal identity and perceptualize the represented. In fact, the proper names of the represented characters are the minimum means for their particularization without which determinate perception is not possible.

Even this is not sufficient to explain the peculiar ontology of drama. It is not enough to say that Rāma and Othello are experienced in their particularities. The philosophical puzzle that disturbs the critic consists in two major points: even if it is understood and accepted that the spectator does not experience the actors but the characters Rāma and Othello perceptually—namely, in their particularities—then the response should also be in accordance with the occurrences of their real counterparts, namely, the spectator should cry when Othello kills Desdemona. But instead, he enjoys this scene. On the other hand, following Bharata, if one understands that what is represented in drama is not any particular character or event but a general principle—the law of causation that justifies reward for the noble and punishment for the ignoble, the archetypal characters and situations, so to say, through some fictional characters (and not through the verifiable characters of any contemporary history)—then these characters and events can be experienced indeterminate—not by *anuvyavasāya* or determinate perception. Abhinavagupta resolves this crisis by saying that what appears in the *anuvyavasāya* of the spectator is not any particular Rāma, but the generality of Rāma in a particular form, since the spectator's attitude has already presumed that what he is going to experience is neither the actor nor Rāma as a living character. Precisely speaking, what he is experiencing is the generality as projected or illustrated in particularity. Therefore Abhinavagupta says that the experience of the spectator is not *anuvyavasāya* as such, but a kind of it where the general is experienced through in the particular.

Further, since the spectator experiences the general, there is no question of any feeling of indifference (*tāṭasthya*) or maintaining a distance from the outside. His experience is essentially an active participation (*svātmānupraveśa*) in the performance as a whole. Abhinavagupta distinguishes the spectator's experience as gustation from three forms of cognition: a) experience of the ordinary emotions aroused by four means of knowledge—perception, inference, testimony, and analogy; b) indifferent or disinterested cognition of the worldly affairs proper to the detached experience of the *yogins*; and c) compact experience (*ekaghana*) of one's own self without any impression of the external world, which is also proper to the *yogic* experience of a higher order. Thus the loss of particularity in this peculiar cognition of the performance enables the spectators to overcome the obstacles of painful experience due to any desire for practical requirements. Performance as an object and its subjective experience are merged into each other (*tanmayatā*). Performance is the artwork, but its experience—the object of the spectator's consciousness—is the ontology of drama (*nāṭyam*).

This experience of drama, connoted by the Sanskrit words *āśvādana*, *rasa*, and *carvaṇā*, is translated into English as “aesthetic experience” by Raniero Gnoli (1956) and as “aesthetic rapture” by J. L. Masson and M. V. Patwardhan (1970). We accept Gnoli’s translation because of its conceptual significance. The term “experience” carries a philosophical connotation that the term “rapture” does not. Further, Gnoli’s translation provides us with an opportunity for juxtaposing the Sanskrit theory of *rasa/āśvādana* relevantly with the Western theory of aesthetic experience and for understanding it in a different way, resolving some of the major crises from which this concept severely suffers.

#### IV



The merit of the Indian theory of *āśvādana/carvaṇā* or *rasa*, as observed in the previous section, consists chiefly in the fact that it rejects any possibility for defining our delightful experiences of nature and artworks in terms of a single way of coming at things, designating it by a common term, *aesthetic*. In other words, for the Sanskrit critics *there is no aesthetic experience* as it is understood by the Western critics. The modifier “aesthetic” might be used in a limited sense to designate *rasa* or *carvaṇā*, where it will refer primarily to our experiences of dramatic performances. Our experiences of different art-forms are of different natures. All of them cannot be designated as *rasa* or *carvaṇā*. The terms only metaphorically designate our experience of nature where the dramatic form is imposed upon it. Nature can be experienced aesthetically only if it is experienced as a drama. *Rasa* in literature is due to the (re)presentation of determinants and so on by a specific linguistic potency called *vyañ-janā*. Experiences of visual arts and music, according to the Sanskrit critics, are not on a par with the experience of drama. Each of them is to be explained and evaluated according to their respective phenomenal character, since the nature of our experience is determined by the nature of the phenomenal fields that constitute it.

So far as the interplay of the allied concepts of aesthetic object, aesthetic attitude, and aesthetic quality is concerned, Sanskrit aesthetics has not fallen a victim to any circularity of argument, because it does not admit of any universal modifier called “aesthetic” that is applicable invariably to nature and all the forms of art. The situation, as presented earlier, is very clear: drama is a performing art. Its only quality is its representational form. The only motive or attitude of the audience is that it perceives (or is going to perceive) an artwork that is a representation of reality (not the reality itself). Its perception of the performance does not maintain any psychic distance or disinterestedness, since its perception is an active participation in its own self. It is an “immersion (*avesa*) in the latent traces of our own sentiments of delight, etc., reawakened by the corresponding determinants, etc., which are generalized.”<sup>26</sup> Finally, the artwork as it appears in the audience’s consciousness or experience

is the “aesthetic object” or the drama proper. A performance without being *experienced* by an audience is not an “aesthetic object” or drama at all—it is simply a performance like any other performance of any action in our real world. If *aesthetic* is used in this specific sense then, there is no need to distinguish between the *aesthetic* and the *artistic*. To quote Abhinavagupta, “Having thus discerned the nature of the phenomenon, there should be no controversy over the meaning of the words.”<sup>27</sup>

## NOTES



1. John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, vol. 10, *Late Works of John Dewey* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), p. 278.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 280.
3. Monroe C. Beardsley, “Aesthetic Experience,” in *The Aesthetic Point of View: Selected Essays*, ed. M. J. Wreen and D. M. Callen (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 288–89.
4. Milton Snoeyenbos, “Attitudes and Aesthetic Theory,” *Personalist* (April 1979): 139–49.
5. Erwin Panofsky, “The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline,” quoted by John Hospers in *Understanding the Arts* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982), p. 345.
6. Snoeyenbos, *op. cit.*, p. 143.
7. Hospers, *op. cit.*, pp. 377–80.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 384–85.
9. W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (London: Methuen, 1954), p. 38.
10. Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1976), p. 262.
11. Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1978), pp. 67–68.
12. Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 113.
13. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 11–12, 366ff.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 367.
15. Rorty’s coinage.
16. John Dewey, “Half-Hearted Naturalism,” *Journal of Philosophy* 24 (1927): 5–9.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Rorty, *op. cit.*, p. 370.
19. J. Z. Young, *An Introduction to the Study of Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); Ellen Dissanayake, *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Comes From and Why?* (New York: Free Press, 1992).
20. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 10–16.
21. This account is based on Abhinavagupta’s commentary on Bharata’s *Nāṭyasāstra*, ch. 6: *Rasa sūtra*.
22. Bharata, *Nāṭyasāstra*, ch. 6: *Rasa sūtra*.



23. Richard Shusterman, "The End of Aesthetic Experience," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55(1) (winter 1997): 30.
24. Abhinavagupta, op. cit., emphasis added.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.

## CHAPTER TEN

# Capture and Line of Flight

## THE EXPERIENCE OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND FILM



JOHN M. CARVALHO

No doubt, a discussion of the experience of photography and film should start with a clarification of the relevant terms. Of course, the same could be said of every discussion, but, in this case, the point will not prove trite. For while it is relatively easy to get clear about the potentially more abstract “experience,” ironically it is not so simple to agree about the concrete things we experience as “photography” and “film.” So widely varied are the possible exemplars of those species of images, from snapshots to gelatin silver prints, home movies to full-length features, that it is not immediately obvious *when* we experience *what* we experience as photography and film. Of course, we only rarely experience photography or film. More regularly, we experience photographs and films, individual tokens of the generic types, and, as we might reasonably expect, our experiences of photographs and films vary relevantly with the differences in the individual images we happen to see or watch. The possibility that there is something common to all our experiences of photographs and all our experiences of films is what I will explore here. In addition, because the experience of photographs and the experience of films vary so widely from each other, I will attempt to compare their different experiences in a way that justifies discussing them together in the same place.

But are photography and film so different, really? For some, I will have stated the case too strongly, too soon. They would have us start by exploring the common association of photography with film. Popularly, photography and film are thought to be produced by manipulations of a camera. And, on

that same view, a dark room, the *camera obscura*, functions in both cases to capture reflected light and fix it by photo-chemical means. In fact, this shared mechanical imaging of a world by use of the camera's lenses, apertures, mirrors, exposures, celluloid, emulsions, and projections is, generally, the basis for classifying photography and film together as industrial rather than fine art. Indeed, because it is noted that photography and film both represent the world through the arbitrary workings of a device that operates on its subject, photography and film are, together, suspected, at one and the same time, of recording that subject without artifice, without adding anything significant to the subject, and of dissimilitude, manipulating the subject for the purposes of misrepresenting it. And, while these observations and, especially, their shared second-class status, may argue for a common connection between photography and film, and while there may be something that can be gained from noticing a special quality the camera adds to the image in each case, it remains that the experience of looking at photographs is fundamentally different from the experience of watching films in large part because the basic unit of appreciation in photography is a still image and, in cinema, it is a motion picture. Film stills and Cindy Sherman's (*Untitled*) *Film Stills* make for interesting border cases. But even these, as we see on closer inspection, are unmistakably experienced as photographs, because their images separate things, and are separate themselves, from the succession of related "movement-images" that would make what is "stilled" in them a "mobile section of duration." In what follows, I start from this difference and focus on different aspects of the very differentiated experience occasioned by photographs and films—one private, the other public; one spatial, the other temporal; one silent, the other aural; one the glimpse of a privileged instant, the other a chain of any-instants-whatever; the one a thick present, the other montage; at the limit of the one, a *punctum*, at the limit of the other, a time-image. These last bits of jargon will be explained in due course. For now let's come to some agreement about what we mean by "experience" in this discussion.

I have nothing special to add to the considerable philosophical scrutiny of experience. (That is, I don't want to argue for a special sense of experience here.) For the purposes of this discussion I rather hope to simplify matters by proposing to follow a selective reading of what Dewey calls "*an experience*" or an "*esthetic experience*."<sup>1</sup> Dewey's view in *Art as Experience* is attractive because it accommodates a wide range of experiences as well as the convergence of these experiences in the course of a personal life or a shared history. In Dewey's well-known example, a stone rolling downhill has an experience just in case

it looks forward with desire to the final outcome, that it is interested in the things it meets along the way, conditions which accelerate or retard its movement with respect to their bearing on that end; that it acts and feels toward them according to the hindering or the helping function it attributes to them; and that the final coming to rest is related to all that went before as the culmination of a continuous movement.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, we have *an* experience when we also experience the connectedness of everything associated with that experience and its connectedness to our whole life, even the lives of others. Dewey believed that experiences tend to fulfillment in the completion of this connectedness and went so far to say that what “distinguishes an experience as aesthetic is conversion of resistance and tensions, of excitations that in themselves are temptations to diversion, into a movement toward an inclusive and fulfilling close.”<sup>3</sup> Since, for Dewey, every encounter with the world that rises above mechanical, rote procedure at the one extreme and aimless, unself-conscious drift at the other is potentially aesthetic,<sup>4</sup> a very wide range of encounters, doings and undoings, ways of trafficking with the world is potentially a movement toward and, potentially, a connectedness to such an inclusive and fulfilling close.

This conclusion will prove especially useful for a discussion of the experience of photography and film. For, however much our experience of looking at photographs differs from our experience of watching films, the experience in both cases is connected to a history of experiencing objects like photographs or films as well as to a personal or, even, a public history that includes photography and film. Nearly everyone, for example, has taken a photograph, been photographed, or seen a photograph.<sup>5</sup> A somewhat smaller sample, perhaps, but large nonetheless (easily inclusive of the people likely to read this chapter) has seen a film; some of us even have made one. At any rate, comparable to the case of popular music perhaps, a great deal of our experiences with photographs and films is richly accessorized by life experiences that ordinarily might be considered beside the point of an aesthetic experience. But if we follow Dewey, we will have a way of understanding how these experiences are importantly constitutive of our experience of photography and film, how what otherwise might be diversions can be taken up and incorporated into our aesthetic experiences of photographs and films. In general, since what importantly distinguishes the experience of photography and film (and music) from the other arts is our popular familiarity with them, by following Dewey here we will have a way of accounting for how the saturation of the market with photographs and films that people are ready to pay handsomely to see or watch is as inextricably tied to the production of photographs and films as well as with the experiences we have of photographs and films.

Let's take the case of photographs first. Nothing is more common than a photograph. We see them everywhere. Not just when we are holding a finished print in our hands or looking at a framed and matted print on a gallery wall, but everywhere and every time we look at the newspaper, at magazines, billboards, IDs, most-wanted lists, milk cartons, yearbooks, travel snaps, wedding shots, postcards, television, the Internet, art books, travel books, history books, calendars, missing-person posters, missing-pet posters, direct mailers, real estate signs, and so on. Advertising is arguably responsible for the largest portion of this vast pool. And, no doubt, the pervasiveness of advertising has had a profound effect on our experience of photographs, nearly as much, per-

haps, as our experiences have been affected by the personal talismanic uses we make of photographs:

The lover's photograph hidden in a married woman's wallet, the poster photograph of a rock star tacked up over an adolescent's bed, the campaign-button image of a politician's face pinned on a voter's coat, the snapshots of a cab-driver's children clipped to the visor—all . . . express a feeling both sentimental and magical: they are attempts to contact or lay claim to another reality.<sup>6</sup>

Arguably, no one has written more compellingly about the experience of photographs than Susan Sontag. In *On Photography*, Sontag writes: "Photographs really are experience captured, and the camera is the ideal arm of consciousness in its acquisitive mood."<sup>7</sup> She thus trades on a commonplace model of the mind, or of visual perception anyway, of eyes turned toward a world whose reflected light is collected on the retina and processed to produce an image of that world, to give an image of a photograph. She attempts, that is, to capture, in an image of the mind at work, the apparatus of capture photography deploys to produce a physical image—opening the lens of a black box to expose film to reflected light and produce, with processing, an object that reflects light—that she has described as analogous to the production of a mental image. This apparent circularity in Sontag's account can be overcome if we focus on the sense of capture that is central to it.

For Sontag, photographs provide evidence, they construct portraits of extended families, they democratize experience, they make things available and serve as tokens for the absence of those same things, good things and bad things, foreign things and some things closer to home. A photograph can be a means of acquiring and gaining control over the thing photographed, as a fetish or as a

part of a system of information, fitted with schemes of classification and storage which range from the crudely chronological order of snapshot sequences pasted in family albums to the dogged accumulations and meticulous filing needed for photography's uses in weather forecasting, astronomy, microbiology, geology, police work, medical training and diagnosis, military reconnaissance, and art history.<sup>8</sup>

Photographs, Sontag thinks, "are a way of imprisoning reality, understood as recalcitrant, inaccessible."<sup>9</sup> And though we can never possess reality, Sontag says, we can possess images of reality, and "to possess the world in the form of images is, precisely, to reexperience the unreality and remoteness of the real."<sup>10</sup> For Sontag, finally, what we experience in photographs is experience captured, and our experiences as well as the captured experience may include experiences of violence, shock, and loss that we don't normally associate with consciousness in its acquisitive mood. Although, if we accept the circularity of Sontag's image of photography, perhaps we should reconsider what we think of as acquisitive consciousness.

For an amplification of Sontag's notion of capture we might consider Georges Dumézil's comparative study of Indo-European religions, where capture is the principal device of the Scandinavian One-Eyed God, Odhinn.<sup>11</sup> On Dumézil's analysis, Odhinn is the Scandinavian representation of the magician-king element of sovereignty (represented by Varuna in India and Romulus in Rome) that opposes but also collaborates with the jurist-priest element of sovereignty represented by the One-Handed God, Tyr. According to the Scandinavian myths, the loss of one of Odhinn's bodily eyes is the means of the magician-king gaining a "spirit eye, the power of second sight, and all the supernatural powers that its possession brings . . . the mutilation was a payment, the resulting disfigurement an enabling certificate, empowering the god to perform his magic function."<sup>12</sup> Where Tyr works by treaties, contracts, and the pledge of the raised or extended hand, Odhinn operates at a distance, casting nets and spells, or leashing his enemies. Dumézil reports about Odhinn from the *Ynglingasaga*: "He could make his enemies blind and deaf, or like stones with fear."<sup>13</sup> With this mode of capture, we find deployed supernatural powers and a spirit eye, and we fill out a sense of the magical that is part of the experience of photographs Sontag describes. We also get an insight into the effect of photography on photography's subjects, who may stiffen unnaturally or relax off-guard in the face of the proximity or remoteness of the camera's one-eyed machinery.

The experience of magic is what I think so fascinated Roland Barthes about photographs. And a review of some of the fruits of that fascination will help fill out the sense of capture I am borrowing from Sontag and Dumézil's account of Odhinn. Part of the magic of photographs, for Barthes, is that they are invisible, that we don't see photographs. We see only the utter contingency they image and the confirmation "that has been" or the evidence these images provide that these contingencies existed. On Barthes's view, what the photograph captures is absolutely singular, the unrepeatable coincidence of a range of particular effects. And, in spite of everything that might compromise its veracity, the photograph is taken as proof of the singularity of that event, as an index of the real. That index is rendered by a general arrangement of the culture, conventions, and codes of photography. The singular content of the image so arranged, the selection of subjects and scenes as well as the relations between these, is what Barthes has termed the *studium*:

The *studium* is a kind of education (knowledge and civility, "politeness") which allows me to discover the *Operator*, to experience the intentions which establish and animate his practices, but to experience them "in reverse," according to my will as a *Spectator*. . . . These myths aim (this is what myth is for) at reconciling the Photograph with society (is this necessary?—Yes, indeed: the Photograph is *dangerous*) by endowing it with *functions*, which are, for the Photographer, so many alibis.<sup>14</sup>

Still, somehow, in the midst of this banality Barthes thinks we may find something about certain photographs that "send us," that take us away. It doesn't

always happen. "Many photographs are, alas," Barthes writes, "inert under my gaze."<sup>15</sup> But when it happens, it charts an adventure that sets out from the background of an "average affect" that, Barthes says, accompanies the recognition and liking for the photograph's *studium*. A photograph sends us when something in it, some aspect of the image—a prick, a mark, a punctuation of the *studium*—stands out from that background and sends us on an adventure. This prick, this mark, is what Barthes terms the *punctum*. And this *punctum* is always, Barthes says, something that moves us deeply, something that both bruises us and is poignant to us.

The experience of a *punctum* is, of course, very different from the shock we sometimes experience in photographs that show us something we have never seen before but that, on the evidence the photograph provides, we must accept as real. We may be shocked by photographs of tragic violence or fleeting beauty, because the image captures and frames something unusual or unique. But the *punctum* is rather something that traverses, lashes, or stripes an image with a detail that the *studium*, which is there to preserve the unity of the image, cannot overwrite. It stands out because and/or by the way it interrupts the unity of the *studium*. So, if the *studium* is shared, public, collective, the *punctum* is, appropriately, rarified and even personal. On Barthes's view, then, what we experience in the vast bulk of photographs is the *studium*, a source of information that has the potential to expand on the culturally diverse information and forms of information that Sontag catalogs in her experiences with photographs. But in special cases, sometimes defined by our personal histories, we experience something else in a photograph, something inert but inviting, Barthes says, that throws the unifying effect of the image off forever, like the boy's bad teeth in William Klein's *Little Italy* (New York, 1954).

This experience, something of a trap set, a net cast by the photograph adds a dimension to the experience of photographs that we do not find in Sontag. It seems worth considering because it brings together, under one description, experiences of photographs of the sort Sontag describes together with the experience of photographs that stand out for us either because they touch us personally or because they disrupt the normal order of experience. And, again, with those photographs that disrupt our ordinary experience, what Barthes has in mind are not just those images that surprise us with something we would not have seen otherwise—Sontag easily accounts for these—but images whose meanings are made obtuse by the photographic art itself, made "messages without a code," as Barthes also terms them,<sup>16</sup> because they defeat significations, because they release the image captured, allowing the meanings of the image to take flight. We see this sort of thing in the photographic series and portraits by Duane Michals, in certain surrealist photography of Man Ray, and in the contemporary innovations of Sherrie Levine, Laurie Simmons, Louise Lawler, Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman, and Mike and Doug Starn. In the work of these artists there is some thing in the image that takes off and leads to critical reflections about the art of photography itself as well as to crit-

ical ruminations about the content of the image photographed. And Barthes's work helps us appreciate this difference.

But as much as these considerations add to our understanding of the truly rare and deeply personal experiences we can have with photographs and of the line of flight that is drawn in some special photographic images, what Barthes says about unitary photographs—photographs that, by virtue of their *studium*, are “tempered by aesthetic or empirical habits”—does not necessarily add to our appreciation of the experience of photographs in general. Only Stieglitz's most famous photograph, *The Horse-Car Terminal* (New York, 1883), moves Barthes. He claims to like André Kertész but cannot say why. The rest of classic art photography, which he does not seem to distinguish from the photographs he flips through while waiting to have his teeth cleaned or his hair cut, is at most a mild distraction for him. But these are the photographs we most often see. And in many of them there is something worth appreciating even if the experience falls short of “photographic *ecstasy*,” something that connects with our personal experiences with photographs, with the experience of taking photographs and being photographed, something we see because we identify with the content of the image and because we share the *studium* represented in the image. Even if it is an image of a distant time or remote place, the generalization of systems of learning and criteria for knowledge the image embodies, together with our acquaintance through other images of this same scene or ones like it, bring us into contact with the image and allow us to be captivated by it.

Moreover, once we recognize the *studium* sedimented in an image, we may come to appreciate, in images that stand out from those of the same sort, the quality that unifies the image, and we may begin to experience the privileged instant captured by that image, as in the photograph by Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Behind the Gare St. Lazare* (1932), for example, or Kertész's *Shadows, Paris* (1931). In these experiences, which may visit our viewing of news, sports, or fashion photographs as well as classic art photography, an instant expands to give us time to spend with it. The moment is thickened to allow the coincidence the photograph captures to be realized in our experience. And it would be fair to describe the satisfaction realized in that experience as more or less fulfilling, tending to a connection with our larger experience of life. So that we can account for a wide range of experiences with photographs. From recognition to ecstasy, capture to flight, photographs bring us to experience life's contingencies as connected to various forms of fulfillment.

When it comes to film, everything is different. Let's start with the things we call “films.” You don't normally hold a film in your hands, if what you want to do is watch it. You don't, yet, find films in books or lying casually about at the dentist's or the barber's. You see films only where they are projected on screens, and you watch a film only when you have seen and been attentive to enough of the whole film to grasp something of what has been presented.



Films are presented in a variety of media: as a projection from a variety of film stocks on a large screen, of course, but also as video projections from tape, compact discs, and direct-broadcast transmission. It is not correct to say that all moving pictures are film, though they may be referred to as such. Rather, there is a standard for film form that has been fashioned over the course of the history of films, that includes the first experiments in film-making and the latest technical innovations, that is often put to different services in television, video, animation, pornography, and home movies of other sorts. That film form involves the deployment of cinematography, staging, acting, editing, and a musical score in the service of a story taken from one of a number of standard genre.

And, again, what is different from the case of photography, but common to every experience of the film form, is the basic unit of appreciation, the moving picture. The photograph is a still image. In it, some section of the visible universe is posed, fixed, and rendered immobile. In film, the image is not just moving but always already a "movement-image." This, at least, is the starting point of Gilles Deleuze's collected ruminations titled *Cinema*.<sup>17</sup> It is the point of those two volumes, a point we return to in a moment, to show how the atrocities of the Second World War imposed a direct time-image on the film form that can be experienced as a certain destiny of film itself. To get to that end, film has first of all to be conceived of as a movement-image, which Deleuze explains by reviewing Bergson's three theses on movement from *Creative Evolution*.<sup>18</sup> The first thesis holds that movement is distinct from the space covered by it: "space covered is past, movement is present, the act of covering."<sup>19</sup> We cannot create a moving image by adding time to a sequence of immobile photographs. However mechanically we care to think about the motion picture of films, the movement in them would still be a qualitative relation between the instants or moments defined by the individual immobile shots and not be reducible to them.

Bergson's second thesis on movement describes two different misconceptions of the immobile moments that are mistakenly added to time to produce the experience of movement. There is the ancient model, ideal moments that we conceive of as connected by reference to their form and their end. And there is the modern scientific model that relates movement to a succession of arbitrary moments, any-instants-whatever, recomposed from the material, immanent elements of bodies in motion, points moving in space, and areas under a curve—in short, from the mechanical succession of arbitrary instants. Cinema conceived as a series of equidistant snapshots selected and set in motion by the uniform, impersonal mechanisms of the motion-picture machine is a natural extension of this modern scientific notion. Still, however remarkable or singular a still film frame may appear, it contributes to the moving picture only just in case the content of that still is always in a process of being formed or dissolving into the movement of lines and points drawn by the any-instants-whatever of the frames linked to it. But this (still) misses the movement of motion pictures, because it assigns to each moment, each still

frame, a position in a movement given in advance of the instants that are supposed to compose it. We need, yet, Bergson's third thesis, according to which the instant is an immobile section of a movement that is, for its part, "a mobile section of duration, that is, of the Whole, or of a whole."<sup>20</sup>

To illustrate this point, Deleuze refers to Bergson's example of the sugar cube dissolving in a glass of water. At every moment, "the movement of translation which detaches the sugar particles and suspends them in the water . . . expresses a change in the whole, that is, in the content of the glass; a qualitative transition from water which contains a sugar lump to the state of sugared water."<sup>21</sup> At the same time, my waiting for this transformation to be complete expresses a duration, a mental or spiritual reality that is a part of this whole transformation. According to Bergson, my waiting is significant because the whole—glass, water, sugar—given in the sugar's dissolving opens onto a greater whole, the duration of the universe that is transformed with the transformations of all these minor durations. Deleuze explains it as follows:

The glass of water is indeed a closed set containing the parts, the water, the sugar, perhaps the spoon: but that is not the whole. The whole creates itself, and constantly creates itself in another dimension without parts—like that which carries along the set of one qualitative state to another, like the pure ceaseless becoming which passes through these states. It is in this sense that it is spiritual or mental.<sup>22</sup>

The third thesis thus recapitulates the first. Movement is a qualitative relation between the parts, the immobile sections, and, also, the duration that makes the parts a whole and an openness to the Whole of experience. So affected are they by the agency of movement that the immobile sections gain depth, lose their contours, and are "united in duration."<sup>23</sup> As a result, they function as "mobile sections of duration," images for which movement is a constitutive part. The basic unit of appreciation in the experience of watching film is a movement-image.

The point adds substance to the intuition that the experience of watching films is more akin to the experience of listening to music than the experience of looking at a photograph or a painting. In the same way with music, as we hear relations between tones and individual tones only as related to neighboring tones, the relevant key, the theme of the whole piece of music and perhaps, also, the whole tradition of which the particular piece of music is a part, we experience motion pictures as relations between images, and individual film images as already in relation to the movement of images that lead up to and follow from them, as moving pictures themselves that have a relation to the particular scene that is unfolding and to the theme of the film as a whole, even to the whole genre of films the particular film represents. At the same time, the point substantiates the thought we've already drawn from Dewey, namely, that experience tends toward inclusivity and fulfillment. In the experience of watching films, this fulfillment is felt in the movement of each passing frame as it edges ever closer to the completion of the film as well as in the enduring

experience of the whole film as it relates to the course of film history, world history, and our whole lives. But it complicates the seemingly mundane observation that the experience of watching films is fundamentally temporal. For, on the view developed by Bergson and advanced by Deleuze, the temporality of film experience is not composed of the movement from one image to the next but, rather, an achronological time, a duration in which all of experience is unfolding. This point will figure in the account of the cinematic ecstasy of the time-image we experience in certain films. For the moment, let's return to some mundane observations that survive this view.

In general, the experience of watching a film is distinctly and constitutively public in ways that the experience of photography is not. The paradigmatic experience of film, the one most idealized by the viewing public, for most films, is the opening-night showing of a film in a major urban venue. Films debut in New York, Los Angeles, and a few other major urban centers and only afterward make their way to the markets defined by smaller urban centers, the suburbs, and beyond.<sup>24</sup> The distribution of films, which forms the basis for our experience of them, is governed by rights bought and sold by the studios in collaboration or by contractual agreements they have made with movie houses that are, of course, more and more centralized and monopolized, some by their connections with the studios themselves, to control the public exposure to films in a way that maximizes profit. Consequently, what is public about our experience of films is also importantly economic. What we experience is entirely connected to a very complex plan to sustain the film industry, which includes several allied industries: site location, set production, transportation, makeup, hair design, wardrobe, lighting, sound recording, a variety of porters (people who lift and carry props, cables, technical equipment, barriers, and so on), custodial people, caterers, drivers, and on and on. There is a small town—thousands of people—involved in the making of a film, and their collaborations are palpable in the experience of film.

All other first viewings of a film are roughly adequated to the opening-night premier: all will have been informed potentially by reviews and gossip, by contested reports from a variety of viewers. Above all, then, the experience of film is public in its paradigmatic cases. It involves going out of our homes, finding a viewing time that fits our already-scheduled activities, securing baby-sitters perhaps, going into the city perhaps, parking, standing in lines, negotiating for the best seats possible, talking afterward about the good and bad points of the film perhaps, finally, sharing our views and the views of others who have seen the film with those who have not, and so on. Even if we now see films reproduced everywhere, on videotape, on DVD, on television, on the Internet, wherever the content can be stored for individual delectation, even if, ironically, the study of film and of the pleasures of cinema, which is quite manifestly a public art, comes from viewings of films and readings of sourcebooks done alone, this can never take away from the paradigmatic case of the experience of film that is public in its arrangements—so much so that

even the few souls who attend the opening of a film alone are caught up in a public spectacle, especially for a film acclaimed in advance.

But when the lights go out and the screen lights up, aren't we finally alone? Laura Mulvey, famously, marshals psychoanalytic theory in support of the claim that the experience of film re-enacts the scopophilic economy of the male gaze.<sup>25</sup> There is a gaze, a way of looking at the world, the argument goes, that sizes things up for the pleasure of men, that sorts, defines, ranks, refines everything, including women, for the pleasure of men. According to Mulvey, in the experience of watching a film the viewer is given to see a world so organized. The relative merits of Mulvey's conclusions about the gendered experience of film-viewing have been discussed by other critics, but the argument, nonetheless and for my purposes, makes a reasonable case for the experience of film as a private experience. In fact, however, what Freud describes as scopophilia is not something private but something shared, and the behaviors leading to it and following from it are supported by a very wide social network of other actions and actors. So that, if Mulvey is right, what we experience as the male gaze at the cinema is a more-or-less controlled discharge of what is, by all other accounts, a collective erotic energy. On the other hand, we can save ourselves the trouble of testing Mulvey's thesis here by considering that however much we may feel "in our own world" in the darkness of the movie theater, however much a film may answer to our own private pleasures, we know we came into that darkened world from the world of our everyday lives and that we will return there as soon as the lights come back on. And we know we never really left that world every time we alter the expression of our feeling for the film, the way we laugh or cry or express our recognition of what is presented on the silver screen because of the audience for that expression and our awareness of that audience.

So we follow ads, check schedules, make arrangements with friends and baby-sitters perhaps, take buses or drive and secure parking, and, of course, pay for the privilege of watching this film. Like music, dance, and theater, film is a performing art. And, though the fee is relatively small, our relationship to film is necessarily mediated by this exchange, which is really just the endpoint of a complex economic system that we call the "film industry." What we see on the screen is the product of enormous collective energy and interaction. The industry is run by complex financial, marketing, and production machines. The long, long list of names we see at the end of every film is only a part of the story. And the ticket price pays for this industry to flourish. When I hand over my money, I gain entry into this sector of the economy (which is conveniently tied to the sector of the economy that serves my dining and other personal needs). And this is just as much true when we rent movies at the video store or from the cable company to watch in the privacy of our homes.

Because the experience of film is so social, we should expect to find, along with a shared experience of film, that different people experience different things when watching films. The audiences who generally enjoy films, and

have the most experiences with film, often divide into those who enjoy particular kinds of films: comedy, action, drama, war stories, horror, science fiction, foreign films, noir, romance, and so on. People whose experience is limited to one or two genres of film have identified what they want to experience in film and find it there. The formulas for producing these films are calculated to produce this effect. Films and the experience of films function at this level as something of a “soft drug,” and addiction is the common result. Viewers who are hooked are only, with difficulty, persuaded to view anything other than what they watch all the time. On the one end, this relation is entirely commercial; on the other, it validates a way of life that generally represents, accurately or wishfully, the lives the audiences for these films are living. As with teenage boys and their high-decibel reproductions of their favorite music, the audiences for repeated viewings of genre films routinely find their lives and the crossroads and conflicts they face in their lives validated in the experience of watching film. This means that, as Barthes says of photographs, the film is invisible and these viewers see only the stories represented in film. But unlike photographs, films force on their viewers an association of visual and aural images that viewers must judge. Genre films present for its viewers ample opportunities for positive judgments about the action in the film and about their own lives that they identify with the lives lived in the film. The same thing happens on a smaller scale with television.

The experience of these viewers of film is validation. What they watch in this experience is the unfolding of a life they can identify or identify with. This is a two-part process. Continuity checks run by the film's producers assure that the otherwise disjointed montage, featuring different characters in different situations, will appear as the seamless narrative of a hero who might be anyone (*Forrest Gump*, 1994) or who is so exemplary as to inspire by his example (*Spartacus*, 1960). For the viewer's part, he or she overlooks the unavoidable breaks in continuity, the cuts and breaks that interweave the different strands of the narrative, to relive the story of the heroic subject. At bottom, this is another economy driven by the need for reassurance and the need to exchange enough hard currency to confirm the value of what is experienced. To produce the films they deem worthy of the seventh art, the film industry markets a lot of films people enjoy enough as amusements to continue paying admission to see them.

It is the films produced to be experienced as art that call for a different kind of analysis. What does it mean for a film to be produced to be experienced as art? At a minimum, that the film aims at a continuity with films experienced as artistic, that the form and content of the film are related so as to produce a sense of unity that such films exhibit, and that the film aims at something more than entertainment. This can be difficult, since there are artistic elements in the most entertaining films—the Marx Brothers's *Duck Soup* (1933), for example, which combines elements of the musical and vaudevillian farce in the service of a story about salvaging a bankrupt nation by courting that nation's wealthiest citizen. What is redeeming about the film,

what elevates it above its comic genius, which is itself an art, is the satire it mounts on the nature of politics, war, and the affairs of state. This feature can be generalized to distinguish all those films that thematize various aspects of the human condition, especially those conditions that give value to human life. What we experience in such films is the clarification of situations that do not necessarily stand out in the course of ordinary experience, even the posing of importantly ethical issues that are not entirely transparent in the everyday trafficking in human affairs.

The experience of such thematic content may prove to be aesthetic if it aids in the completion of the human lives it clarifies, if by the thematic outlines it draws around the general circumstances and decisions encountered in the course of ordinary human life it hastens the fulfillment of a particular human life. The experience may be of the sharpening of the details and options of our everyday experience as they present themselves in the course of our trafficking with the world such that we are better prepared to draw from those experiences the means to a more inclusive and fulfilling experience of our whole life in relation to the lives of others. Alternatively, the experience may be more therapeutic, the encounter with themes exhibiting the ethical ambiguities of life taken as validating the ambiguities I experience in the world outside the film and giving us, in the resolution of them offered in the cinematic narrative, a sense of how they might turn out in our own lives, even when, as in Robert Altman's *The Player* (1992) or Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), there is no resolution of the drama. But how, then, are such cinematic experiences different from the experience of literature? What else does the experience of a film afford us that a novel or short story does not apart from the convenience of watching the narrative unfold before our eyes rather than having to read it for ourselves?

There is something unique about the cinematic narrative that is brought out by Joseph Margolis in the essay, "Mechanical Reproduction and Cinematic Humanism," the last chapter of his *What, After All, Is a Work of Art?*<sup>26</sup> For Margolis, the experience of film does not highlight the ordinary vagaries of ethical circumstances and decision-making; rather, it illustrates the creative formation of subjective identities against the background flux of our human and personal histories. Arguing against Kracauer on the one side and Benjamin on the other, Margolis claims that the experience of film "recovers . . . the continuing process of our own enculturation. We are, so to say, confronted, by filmic proxy, with the montaged structures of our own lives and sensibilities."<sup>27</sup> As is often the case, Margolis is making more than one point at the same time: first, there is the view, defended in a number of publications over the last several years, that our lives, and the experience of our lives, are "historicized" or in flux, that what is true about us is true over the course of sedimented encounters with the real and that that truth is in formation, constantly adjusting to the sedimentation of the real and never fixed. Next, there is the idea of an identity that measures up to this flux. It is not the case for Margolis that we have no identity—just that our identities are constantly changing,

modified, in the face of the next most impressive constellation of circumstances. And, again, there is the conception of film as montage that does not distort the truth, as Benjamin worried it would, nor correct the misconceptions about the real as Kracauer hoped it would, but that models a form of creativity that is art, after all, and that is an example for how we can construct identities for ourselves as works of art, though Margolis stops (just) short of this suggestion.

The virtue of this idea is that it draws its conclusions from a feature that is distinctive to film—the montage. What Margolis sees in montage is the creative construction of unity from the variety of resources available to the director, the actor, and the viewer. If the whole of our lives or the end toward which our lives are essentially directed is not given in advance, all we can do is construct a whole in the course of our lives' proceeding irremediably toward its final end, its death. Filmic montage gives us an example of how this can be accomplished. Montage shows how a unity can be fashioned from apparently disparate elements that have emerged in the context of a fluxive history. This is not the experience of film everyone will have, but it is the experience of film-goers who are attentive to the especially filmic features of the narrative and who are, at the same time, sensitive to the fluxive character of the history their own experiences will have. This is another relatively small sample but, again, potentially a significant sampling of the readers of this chapter.

There is, finally, an encounter with film that is more rarified and that experiences film as the paradigm of a new epistemology, a new way of thinking. This view is hard to summarize in a few words, but, to put it baldly, it is the experience of a direct image of time—a time-image—in film. This is the experience Deleuze, again, thinks is most prescient in our viewings of, especially, neo-realist and “new-wave” films, films whose subject and direction bear the effects of the Second World War. The effects Deleuze has in mind are not the specific atrocities of Hitler or Stalin (the way Adorno said that, after Auschwitz, there could be no poetry); Deleuze is, rather, thinking of the bombed-out cities and shattered lives that were the aftermath of the war's destruction. The stories to be told under these circumstances about ordinary people negotiating such a world departed significantly from the stories about the extraordinary individuals performing heroic acts in classic American cinema.

To tell these stories, Deleuze remarks, neo-realist and new-wave film-makers had to capture the breakdown of the “sensory-motor link” of the relation of perception to action that characterized classic cinema. In Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity* (1944), for example, what we see and what the characters in the film see and hear and feel always lead to action, even if these actions do not in every case work out as planned. But in the context of postwar Europe, it was not always clear what one was seeing, what there was to do, or what means were available for getting things done. To tell their stories, the Italians took advantage of a relatively sophisticated film industry, erected by the Axis propaganda machine, to film images of elliptical, unorganized lives that had

not yet fallen into step with the ideology of the American dream. They had, Deleuze says, “an intuitive consciousness” of a new image “in the course of [its] being born.” They discovered, Rossellini in particular, “a dispersed and lacunary reality . . . a series of fragmentary, chopped up encounters” that challenged the “action-image” of classic cinema.<sup>28</sup> The neo-realist film-makers introduced modern cinema to the time-image, the image of empty spaces, any-places-whatever, pure optical and sound situations where, according to Deleuze, “making false” became the sign of a “new realism,” and the sensory-motor continuity of the action-image started to unravel.<sup>29</sup>

It would take the French longer to realize this effect. Too ready to identify with the victors, too invested in the image of the Resistance as an organized military machine, it would take Godard, Truffaut, Chabrol, and others to bring to the French screen obscure circumstances, empty spaces, and “a race of charming, moving characters who are hardly concerned by the events happening to them.”<sup>30</sup> In French new-wave films, we see, and the characters in these films experience, the breakdown of purpose in action, the collapse of time to the time of the event, the trivialization of everyday life, all made visible by examples of what Deleuze calls “false-movement”: warped perspectives, variable slow-motion, clichéd gestures that work to falsify the meaning of action on the screen and to build up an autonomous mental image. With these films, Deleuze says, cinema started to think, even if it had to become difficult to do this.<sup>31</sup> Film became difficult, and the experience of watching film became difficult, by giving up on action and committing itself to a direct image of time, not a representation of time (sand pouring through an hourglass in *The Wizard of Oz* [1939], for example), but a direct time-image characterized by aberrant movement, discontinuity, and cliché set in pure optical-and-sound situations. Alain Resnais’s *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961) is the classic example. But the same could be said of nearly all of Godard’s films.

What we experience while watching these films is an image of thought, thinking with images, consciousness in its creative rather than its acquisitive mode. This experience, which is appropriately rarified, gives us an idea of how we might think if we were artists rather than philosophers or scientists or ordinary people trying to act out our lives toward the kind of fulfillment Dewey has in mind. The experience serves as a limit case that helps us appreciate the experiences of watching films Margolis urges us to consider, as well as the experiences of those whose attention to the narrative details makes the ethical dimensions of films stand out. If, for this last group, the experience of film captures an aspect of human life we might otherwise miss, Margolis and Deleuze offer alternative cinematic ecstasies—one caught up in the dizzying flux of emerging cultural entities that describes, at once, all art, including films, human history, and the formation of individual human subjects, the other taking flight from the experience of duration, achronological time, and the new image of thought that is offered and developed by a distinctively cinematic art. In fact, both Margolis and Deleuze use the experience of film to



offer visions of human thinking and experience that expand on the sense of fulfillment Dewey conceived, toward a connectedness to the greater complexities of human life on the one hand and a connectedness to the outer limits of human life on the other.

So, on first glance at photography and film, and the experience of photography and film, nothing could be more different—still image on the one hand, movement-image on the other, a private moment of reflections with photographs contrasted with the public spectacle of film-viewing, the way we *look* at photographs but *watch* a film, the cultural sedimentation of the *studium* packed into the photograph's frame versus the culture of a narrative emerging over the length of a feature film, the silence of the photograph as compared with the aural dimension of film that includes not only dialogue and background textures but soundtracks imported to create a mood or support a judgment where the image or the action does not suffice—the privileged instants captured on the one hand and the chain of any-instants-whatever let loose on the other, the thick present that idealizes that privileged instant in the photograph and the montage in film that links the any-instants-whatever to a focused point or affect, *the punctum*, prick, point, mark that stands out for me alone in a photograph and the duration, direct image of time—the time-image that stands for a general breakdown in an accepted way of living in the world that the devastation of the last great war (the same war that is relived nostalgically in the memories of the “greatest generation”) has inflicted.

And yet, through the lens of a certain *camera obscura*, philosophical reflection, the experience of photography and the experience of film can be shown to exhibit certain common features or, better, to negotiate the middle ground between shared limits of their different experiences: capture and flight. On the one hand, photography and film deploy apparatuses of capture. They focus on and draw in, they circumscribe and delimit, they organize, arrange, and preserve the scenes of our human lives. The photograph does this by isolating, framing, idealizing, and repeating a single moment that has been and never will be again. Film does this by inventing, incorporating, accessorizing, and publicizing moments that never were but are destined to become a part of what has been. The photograph preserves a moment to be appreciated after the fact. Film creates stories that validate or ask us to question lives that we are living and will go on living after the film is over. Photographs and films, both, bring together in one place people, peoples, objects, events, histories, and fantasies that would otherwise be scattered and separate. Both photography and film work their one-eyed magic on subjects to reveal aspects of those subjects heretofore hidden from view but now visible to whoever happens to look at or watch the image made of them.

At the other extreme, photographs and films draw a line of flight that decomposes the image, attributes a new mystery to their subject, and questions the regime of representation that holds the image together or, even, holds

together the dominant image of thought. In photographs, this happens when some aspect of the image, something that stands out for us, typically something blunt or obtuse, something that resists signification or something that upsets the significations the image is at pains to convey, something that pricks us and punctuates the emerging cultural scene of the image, sends us on an adventure, transports us to a dimension that alters the image and what it otherwise signifies, forever. This happens with those personal photographs we treasure so deeply, but also with those photographs we come upon casually that stand out for us by virtue of this mark, as well as with those photographs whose aim is to produce *puncta*—photographs by Cindy Sherman, Richard Prince, John Baldasari, Sherrie Levine, and Mike and Doug Starn, for example—to comment on or challenge the common assumptions about photography and representation.

In films this happens especially in those works that have abandoned the action format and the tragic narrative formula in favor of elliptical images of anonymous characters whose stories are neither compelling nor profound and whose banality saturates the motion-picture screen with purely optical-and-sound situations, such as in Jean-Luc Godard's *Two or Three Things I Know about Her* (1966) for example, and by so doing introduce a new image to film, the time-image, the direct presentation of a duration that is the time it takes the film to run from start to finish but also the time of the whole film that the film produces and even the whole of experience that includes the time of this film. In these films, where nothing happens, there is a critique of the traditional film form and the narrative form that goes back to Aristotle, which features heroic figures overcoming the obstacles and ambiguities of life on their way to fulfilling their preordained destinies, and, at the same time, the invention of a different way of thinking, consciousness in its creative mode, thinking with images rather than formulas and concepts. And on these terms, the seventh art draws a line of flight that invites abandoning our accepted way of life, including all the ethical and conceptual impasses that lead us to consult art for answers.

That said, it remains to consider whether this exercise of pairing the experience of photography and the experience of film is an act of the acquisitive or creative mode of consciousness, whether it is a spell cast or a line drawn across emerging cultures of the industrial, commercial, and also fine arts that flies us to a new understanding of each of them that could not be accomplished by studying them alone. While I would like to think I have sketched a possible line of flight, I hope, at least, to have captured something of the experience that attends photographs and films—enough of their respective experiences, anyway, that will allow a more practiced and artful eye to plot the arc that takes both out of the orbit of mundane scholarly exercises and into a truly aesthetic appreciation and experience of photography and film.

## NOTES



1. John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigree Books, 1980), pp. 35–57.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
5. Andy Warhol's *Four Jackies* (1965) attests to the shared effect of the news photographs of, then, Jacqueline Kennedy, at the funeral for her husband, the 35th president of the United States.
6. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1978), p. 10.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 164.
11. Georges Dumézil, *Mitra-Varuna*, trans. D. Coltman (New York: Zone Books, 1988), pp. 139–59.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 143. See also Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “7000 B.C.: Apparatus of Capture,” in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 424. Deleuze and Guattari attribute the curious rhythm that animates the state apparatus to the twin sovereignty of the one-eyed and the one-armed.
14. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. R. Howard (New York: Noonday Press, 1981), p. 28.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
16. See Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. R. Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 3–62.
17. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. H. Tomlinson and R. Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).
18. See Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. A. Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt, 1954); and Deleuze, *Cinema 1* (op. cit.), pp. 1–11.
19. Deleuze, *Cinema 1* (op. cit.), p. 1.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
24. These remarks, as all my remarks on the experience of film, are drawn from my own experiences watching films in the United States. I take that elaborate film industry as a model for the production and distribution of films elsewhere. No doubt, there are exceptions to this “rule,” and I look forward to learning more about film experiences that depart from this model.
25. Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16(3) (autumn 1975): 6–18.
26. Joseph Margolis, *What, After All, Is a Work of Art?* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), pp. 101–27.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

28. Deleuze, *Cinema 1* (op. cit.), p. 212.

29. Ibid., p. 213.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., p. 215.

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## ABOUT THE EDITOR AND CONTRIBUTORS



**JOHN M. CARVALHO** teaches philosophy at Villanova University in Pennsylvania. He has contributed several essays on different issues of the philosophy of art, including a chapter on Nietzsche in the *Cambridge Studies in Philosophy and the Arts* (1998).

**STEPHEN DAVIES** is associate professor of philosophy at Auckland University in New Zealand. He has extensively published on aspects of aesthetics with the Cornell University Press and in several scholarly journals. He is co-editing with Ananta Ch. Sukla a volume titled *Art and Essence* for the Praeger series, *Studies in Art, Culture, and Communities*.

**T. J. DIFFEY** is professor of philosophy at the University of Sussex in England. He was editor of the *British Journal of Aesthetics*, succeeding its founding editor, Harold Osborne. His contributions to various aspects of aesthetics are numerous.

**JOSEPH KUPFER** is professor of philosophy at Iowa State University. He has specialized in pragmatic aesthetics and his publications include *Experience as Art* (1983), among several others.

**JOHN LLEWELYN** is professor of philosophy at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. His publications include, among many others, a chapter on linguistic representation in *Art and Representation*, edited by Ananta Ch. Sukla (Praeger, 2001).

**GRAHAM MCFEE** is professor of sports science, dance, and leisure at the Chelsea School of Physical Education, University of Brighton (England). He has specialized in various aspects of dance theory.

**ROBERT STECKER** is professor of philosophy at Central Michigan University in Mt. Pleasant. He has published widely on literary theory and related areas of aesthetics.

**ANANTA CH. SUKLA** is professor of English at Sambalpur University (India). He has been visiting professor at the University of Uppsala and has lectured at several European universities. His areas of scholarly interest include literary criticism, cultural studies, and comparative aesthetics. He is the founding editor of the *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* and the founding editor (in 2000) of the Praeger series, *Studies in Art, Culture, and Communities*. Over the years his publications have included numerous journal articles, book chapters, and monographs such as *The Concept of Imitation in Greek and Indian Aesthetics* (1977) and *Art and Representation* (Praeger, 2001).

**RICHARD WOODFIELD** is professor of art history and visual art at the University of Nottingham (England). He was general-secretary for several years of the British Society of Aesthetics and of the International Association for Aesthetics. His major publications include works on the art historian Ernst Gombrich.

**KEITH YANDELL** is professor of philosophy at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He has published widely on the philosophy of religion, including *Epistemology of Religious Experience* (1995) and *Philosophy of Religion: A Contemporary Introduction* (1999).